

February 11, 2021

Dear Chair Witt, Vice-Chair Breese-Iverson, Vice-Chair Hudson and Committee Members:

The Portland Veterinary Medical Association opposes House Bill 2733.

Rabies vaccination of dogs is required by law under Chapter 333, Division 19 - Health Division rules. This rule was created to protect the public against rabies by immunizing dogs. The core mission of Animal Control agencies has been to protect public health. Decoupling negates this commitment.

Discontinuation of a rabies vaccine requirement for licensing, particularly in a region and era of increased vaccine hesitancy, threatens the current canine rabies eradication status of the US. Dogs are imported into the state of Oregon from all over the U.S. and beyond, including from endemic areas with little assurance or documentation of prior vaccination. Unvaccinated dogs may also be subject to euthanasia or harsher quarantine in the event of a rabies exposure; most dog owners are unaware of these rules pertaining to dog bite incidents.

Vaccine certificates are provided to owners when an animal is vaccinated against rabies. Rabies vaccine information has been sent to Multnomah County Animal Service by local veterinarians (and similar requirements exist in other Oregon counties) since 2007 to support licensing efforts. An efficient system to process and manage this information has not been put into place, resulting in understandable administrative challenges and a significant backlog.

By extending a 60-day grace period, this may allow people to get a license without a rabies vaccine. This may translate into the potential for pets to not get vaccinated for rabies and in turn increase the populations of dogs susceptible to rabies. Oregonians may face the need for increased post-exposure prophylaxis after dog bite incidents if our population of dogs without a rabies vaccine increases.

According to Oregon Health Authority data, there have been 204 cases of wildlife that tested positive for rabies from 2000-2015. Rabies has been found in bats, foxes, and coyotes in the State of Oregon. In 2014, Oregon published information on animal bites. The report identified 1236 Oregonians had suffered from dog bites in Oregon in 2013 alone (most likely under reported).

We value our animal welfare agencies and support their efforts, but caution that decoupling may have a significant negative effect on both human health and animal health, and animal control funding over the long term. There are numerous opportunities to improve access and ease of purchasing and renewing licenses, as well as to improve the system in place for processing and maintaining rabies vaccination data.

Thank you,

PVMA Board of Directors
Cristina Keef, Executive Director