

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STAFF FINAL BILL ANALYSIS

BILL #: CS/HB 303 Rabies Vaccinations

SPONSOR(S): Regulatory Reform & Economic Development Subcommittee, Killebrew and others

TIED BILLS: **IDEN./SIM. BILLS:** SB 334

FINAL HOUSE FLOOR ACTION: 115 Y's

0 N's

GOVERNOR'S ACTION: Pending

SUMMARY ANALYSIS

CS/HB 303 passed the House on February 1, 2024, and subsequently passed the Senate on February 14, 2024.

In Florida, the practice of "veterinary medicine" means the diagnosis of medical conditions of animals, and the prescribing or administering of medicine and treatment to animals for the prevention, cure, or relief of a wound, fracture, bodily injury, or disease. Veterinarians are regulated by the Board of Veterinary Medicine (Board) in the Department of Business and Professional Regulation (DBPR) pursuant to ch. 474, F.S., relating to veterinary medical practice (practice act).

All dogs, cats, and ferrets four months of age or older must be vaccinated by a licensed veterinarian against rabies with a vaccine that is licensed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) for use in those species. The owner must have the animal revaccinated 12 months after the initial vaccination, and subsequent vaccinations must conform to the vaccine manufacturer's directions. The cost of vaccination must be borne by the animal's owner. Violations of this requirement are a civil infraction, punishable by a penalty of up to \$500.

Currently, Florida law does not appear to allow anyone other than a licensed veterinarian to administer the rabies vaccine. According to Board rule, rabies is recognized as a disease that is communicable to humans and a public health significance, and as a result, only a veterinarian is authorized to immunize or treat an animal for this disease.

The bill:

- Allows an employee, an agent, or a contractor of a county or municipal animal control authority, or sheriff, acting under the indirect supervision of a veterinarian, to administer rabies vaccinations to impounded dogs, cats, and ferrets that will be transferred, rescued, fostered, adopted, or reclaimed by the owner.
- Provides that the supervising veterinarian assumes responsibility for any person vaccinating animals at his or her direction or under his or her direct or indirect supervision.
- Defines "indirect supervision," to mean the supervising veterinarian is required to be available for consultation through telecommunications but is not required to be physically present during such consultation.
- Authorizes veterinarians who supervise the administration of the rabies vaccination to affix his or her signature stamp in lieu of an actual signature to the rabies vaccination certificate.

The bill is expected to have a positive fiscal impact on local government, and may have a positive fiscal impact on the private sector.

Subject to the Governor's veto powers, the effective date of this bill is July 1, 2024.

I. SUBSTANTIVE INFORMATION

A. EFFECT OF CHANGES:

Current Situation

Practice of Veterinary Medicine

The Board of Veterinary Medicine (Board) in the Department of Business and Professional Regulation (DBPR) implements the provisions of ch. 474, F.S., relating to veterinary medical practice (practice act). The purpose of the practice act is to ensure that every veterinarian practicing in this state meets minimum requirements for safe practices to protect public health and safety.¹

A “veterinarian” is a health care practitioner licensed by the Board to engage in the practice of veterinary medicine in Florida² and they are subject to disciplinary action from the Board for various violations of the practice act.³

The practice of “veterinary medicine” is the diagnosis of medical conditions of animals, and the prescribing or administering of medicine and treatment to animals for the prevention, cure, or relief of a wound, fracture, bodily injury, or disease, or holding oneself out as performing any of these functions.⁴

Veterinary medicine includes, with respect to animals:⁵

- Surgery;
- Acupuncture;
- Obstetrics;
- Dentistry;
- Physical therapy;
- Radiology;
- Theriogenology (reproductive medicine); and
- Other branches or specialties of veterinary medicine.

The practice act does not apply to the following categories of persons:

- Veterinary aides, nurses, laboratory technicians, preceptors,⁶ or other employees of a licensed veterinarian, who administer medication or provide help or support under the responsible supervision⁷ of a licensed veterinarian;
- Certain non-Florida licensed veterinarians who are consulting upon request of a Florida-licensed veterinarian on the treatment of a specific animal or on the treatment on a specific case of the animals of a single owner.
- Faculty veterinarians when they have assigned teaching duties at accredited⁸ institutions;
- Certain graduated intern/resident veterinarians of accredited institutions;

¹ S. 474.201, F.S.

² S. 474.202(11), F.S.

³ Ss. 474.213 & 474.214, F.S.

⁴ See s. 474.202(9), F.S. Also included is the determination of the health, fitness, or soundness of an animal, and the performance of any manual procedure for the diagnosis or treatment of pregnancy or fertility or infertility of animals.

⁵ See s. 474.202(13), F.S. S. 474.202(1), F.S., defines “animal” as “any mammal other than a human being or any bird, amphibian, fish, or reptile, wild or domestic, living or dead.”

⁶ A preceptor is a skilled practitioner or faculty member who directs, teaches, supervises, and evaluates students in a clinical setting to allow practical experience with patients. See also <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/preceptor#medicalDictionary> (last visited Nov. 30, 2023).

⁷ The term “responsible supervision” is defined in s. 474.202(10), F.S., as the “control, direction, and regulation by a licensed doctor of veterinary medicine of the duties involving veterinary services” delegated to unlicensed personnel.

⁸ Ss. 474.203(1) and (2), F.S., provide that accreditation of a school or college must be granted by the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) Council on Education, or the AVMA Commission for Foreign Veterinary Graduates.

- Certain students in a school or college of veterinary medicine who perform assigned duties by an instructor or work as preceptors;
- Certain doctors of veterinary medicine employed by a state agency or the United States Government;
- Persons or their employees caring for the persons' own animals, as well as certain part-time or temporary employees, or independent contractors, who are hired by an owner to help with herd management and animal husbandry tasks; and
- Certain entities or persons⁹ that conduct experiments and scientific research on animals as part of the development of pharmaceuticals, biologicals, serums, or treatment methods of treatment or techniques to diagnose or treatment of human ailments, or in the study and development of methods and techniques applicable to the practice of veterinary medicine.¹⁰

Any permanent or mobile establishment where a licensed veterinarian practices must have a premises permit issued by DBPR.¹¹ Each person to whom a veterinary license or premises permit is issued must conspicuously display such document in her or his office, place of business, or place of employment in a permanent or mobile veterinary establishment or clinic.¹²

By virtue of accepting a license to practice veterinary medicine in Florida, a veterinarian consents to:

- Render a handwriting sample to an agent of the department and, further, to have waived any objections to its use as evidence against her or him.
- Waive the confidentiality and authorize the preparation and release of medical reports pertaining to the mental or physical condition of the licensee when the department has reason to believe that a violation of this chapter has occurred and when the department issues an order, based on the need for additional information, to produce such medical reports for the time period relevant to the complaint.¹³

For Fiscal Year 2021-2022, there were 12,360 actively licensed veterinarians in Florida. DBPR received 568 complaints, which resulted in 26 disciplinary actions.¹⁴

Rabies Vaccinations

According to the World Health Organization, “rabies is a vaccine-preventable viral disease which occurs in more than 150 countries and territories. Once clinical symptoms appear, rabies is virtually 100 percent fatal. In up to 99 percent of cases, domestic dogs are responsible for rabies virus transmission to humans. Rabies can be prevented through vaccination of dogs and prevention of dog bites.”¹⁵

All dogs, cats, and ferrets four months of age or older must be vaccinated **by a licensed veterinarian** against rabies with a vaccine that is licensed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) for use in those species.¹⁶ The owner must have the animal revaccinated 12 months after the initial vaccination, and subsequent vaccinations must conform to the vaccine manufacturer's directions. The cost of

⁹ See s. 474.203(6), F.S., which states that the exemption applies to “[s]tate agencies, accredited schools, institutions, foundations, business corporations or associations, physicians licensed to practice medicine and surgery in all its branches, graduate doctors of veterinary medicine, or persons under the direct supervision thereof....”

¹⁰ See s. 474.203, F.S.

¹¹ S. 474.215(1), F.S.

¹² S. 474.216, F.S.

¹³ S. 474.2185, F.S.

¹⁴ Department of Business and Professional Regulation, *Division of Professions Annual Report Fiscal Year 2021-2022*, <http://www.myfloridalicense.com/DBPR/os/documents/Division%20Annual%20Report%20FY%2021-22.pdf> (last visited Nov. 30, 2023).

¹⁵ World Health Organization, Rabies, Sep. 20, 2023, <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/rabies> (last visited Dec. 14, 2023).

¹⁶ S. 828.30(1), F.S.

vaccination must be borne by the animal's owner. Violations of this requirement are a civil infraction, punishable by a penalty of up to \$500.¹⁷

A dog, cat, or ferret is exempt from vaccination against rabies if a licensed veterinarian has examined the animal and has certified in writing that the vaccination would endanger the animal's health because of its age, infirmity, disability, illness, or other medical considerations. An exempt animal must be vaccinated against rabies as soon as its health permits.¹⁸

Upon vaccination, the licensed veterinarian is required to provide the animal's owner and the animal control authority with a rabies vaccination certificate.¹⁹ The veterinarian who administers the rabies vaccine to an animal as required under this section may affix his or her signature stamp in lieu of an actual signature.²⁰

Currently, Florida law does not appear to allow anyone other than the veterinarian to administer the rabies vaccine. The law allows certain vaccines, anesthesia and tranquilization to be administered by a veterinary aide, nurse, laboratory technician, intern, or other employee of a licensed veterinarian while under the "immediate supervision" of a licensed veterinarian.²¹ In addition, the following tasks may be performed without the licensed veterinarian on the premises:

- The administration of medication and treatment, **excluding vaccinations**, as directed by the licensed veterinarian; and
- The obtaining of samples and the performance of those diagnostic tests, including radiographs, directed by the licensed veterinarian.²²

The Board has recognized that the following diseases are communicable to humans and are of public health significance, and as a result, **only a veterinarian** is authorized to immunize or treat an animal for these diseases. The diseases include:

- Brucellosis.
- Tuberculosis.
- Rabies.
- Equine Encephalomyelitis.²³

Effect of the Bill

The bill:

- Allows an employee, an agent, or a contractor of a county or municipal animal control authority, or sheriff, acting under the indirect supervision of a veterinarian, to administer rabies vaccinations to impounded dogs, cats, and ferrets that will be transferred, rescued, fostered, adopted, or reclaimed by the owner.
- Provides that the supervising veterinarian assumes responsibility for any person vaccinating animals at his or her direction or under his or her direct or indirect supervision.
- Defines "indirect supervision," to mean the supervising veterinarian is required to be available for consultation through telecommunications but is not required to be physically present during such consultation.

¹⁷ See s. 828.27(2), F.S.

¹⁸ S. 828.30(2), F.S.

¹⁹ Each animal control authority and veterinarian shall use the "Rabies Vaccination Certificate" of the National Association of State Public Health Veterinarians (NASPHV) or an equivalent form approved by the local government that contains all the information required by the NASPHV Rabies Vaccination Certificate.

²⁰ S. 828.30(3), F.S.

²¹ S. 474.202(5), F.S., defines "immediate supervision" or words of similar purport to mean a licensed doctor of veterinary medicine is on the premises whenever veterinary services are being provided.

²² R. 61G18-17.005, F.A.C.

²³ R. 61G18-17.006, F.A.C.

- Authorizes veterinarians who supervise the administration of the rabies vaccination to affix his or her signature stamp in lieu of an actual signature to the rabies vaccination certificate.

II. FISCAL ANALYSIS & ECONOMIC IMPACT STATEMENT

A. FISCAL IMPACT ON STATE GOVERNMENT:

1. Revenues:

None.

2. Expenditures:

None.

B. FISCAL IMPACT ON LOCAL GOVERNMENTS:

1. Revenues:

Indeterminate. Animal control authorities will be able to administer rabies vaccinations to impounded animals without a veterinarian having to be physically present. This may create a savings for local animal control authorities to the extent they are incurring extra veterinary costs associated with veterinarians currently required to be onsite to administer rabies vaccinations.

2. Expenditures:

None.

C. DIRECT ECONOMIC IMPACT ON PRIVATE SECTOR:

The bill may reduce the amount of rabies cases in the state, the associated risks to the health of humans and animals, and related expenses.

D. FISCAL COMMENTS:

None.