



**THE HUMANE SOCIETY
OF THE UNITED STATES**

**Testimony in Support of HB 5804
March 3rd, 2022
Molly Tamulevich, Michigan State Director
The Humane Society of the United States**

On behalf of our Michigan supporters, the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) is writing to express our support for House Bill 5804, which will increase access to veterinary care and allow more pet owners, no matter their circumstances, to utilize vital services and help assure the health and wellbeing of their companion animals.

One of the first barriers to access, is getting clients in the door. Many families have time constraints that are incompatible with the hours veterinary clinics keep or have transportation issues and cannot travel to an office. Or have a pet that reacts poorly to visiting veterinary clinics. There are numerous scenarios where virtual care could alleviate those problems and allow a veterinarian to first establish a relationship with a patient and caretaker ahead of an in-person visit. Veterinarians are already using techniques to establish veterinary-client-patient relationships (VCPR) without ever touching an animal, for example using low-stress handling. In situations where a pet is acting aggressively, veterinarians are typically not performing physical examinations but instead relying on visual cues and patient history. The broader definition of sufficient knowledge that HB 5804 allows, gives veterinarians the ability to exercise their professional judgement in making clinical decisions about a patient's health. DVMs have undergone rigorous education and training to prepare them for practice and we should trust their judgement in veterinary medicine, including in the utilization of telemedicine. Additionally, by allowing practices to establish or maintain a VCPR through telemedicine services, communities that have traditionally been underserved and would have greater access to important pet-keeping resources.

Telemedicine is one of the most effective methods for providing animal wellness services equitably and was utilized without incident in numerous states during the height of the coronavirus pandemic. We are not advocating for any mandate by the legislature requiring veterinarians offer telemedicine services or establish VCPRs exclusively through electronic means, but those who choose to offer these services can not only provide quality, and potentially lifesaving care, but can also improve efficiency within their practices and offer more flexible scheduling options to clients.

Pet companionship should not be reserved solely for those above a certain income threshold. Pets offer joy and comfort to their caregivers, and it has been well-documented that companion animals also provide numerous physical and mental health benefits. However, without adequate access to veterinary services and pet resources, both families and pets suffer, and in many instances, this results in relinquishment which negatively affects all parties involved.

We thank the committee for your attention to this important issue and urge the committee to vote favorably on HB 5804 to better serve Michigan's pet owners and veterinary community.