

Companion Animal Board

Senate File 73 (Ruud) – House File 208 (Freiberg)



About the Companion Animal Board Legislation

According to its advocates, the Companion Animal Board bill was introduced with the goal of creating a state board with specific expertise and skills to lead and respond to issues pertaining to companion animal issues – including health, welfare, and well-being.

The MVMA has carefully reviewed this bill and has met with its proponents. This bill is not a good policy and we encourage our members and others to oppose it.

The American Veterinary Medical Association opposes this proposed legislation because it:

- ▶ Gives power to a governmental agency that should be the responsibility of a **licensed veterinarian**
- ▶ Is unclear whether Companion Animal Board resources and authority would be administered by **licensed veterinarian**
- ▶ Lacks clarity regarding its compelling need, purpose, function, and benefits
- ▶ Potential interference of **practice of veterinary medicine**
- ▶ May conflict with existing state animal care regulations and responsibilities

The MVMA is opposed to this legislation for the following reasons:

- ▶ The definition of “Companion Animal” goes beyond dogs and cats. It includes “any animal owned, possessed by, cared for, or controlled by a person for the present or future enjoyment of that person or another as a pet or companion, or any stray pet or stray companion animal.” (see MN Stat. 343.20(6)) This bill could pertain to literally any species of animal.
- ▶ Creating this board is duplicative, unnecessary, and costly. The mission of the current Board of Animal Health is “to protect the health of the state’s domestic animals through education and cooperation with veterinarians, producers, owners and communities.” The proponents of this bill have not demonstrated the need for a Companion Animal Board. The creation of a duplicative board will make it more difficult to respond to a zoonotic disease such as rabies.
- ▶ This legislation would reduce the effectiveness of the Board of Animal Health, which is already under-funded, to be able to manage the spread of another virus, such as the African Swine fever, which caused havoc in the agriculture economy. This ultimately impacts our food supply and what is sold at the grocery store. We need a strong and functioning Board of Animals Health.
 - This is of particular significance following the re-entry of African swine fever virus (ASFV) into the western hemisphere (Hispaniola) for the first time in the last 40 years. ASFV is a highly fatal disease of swine with mortality rates exceeding 95% in clinical cases.
 - The entry of this virus into the US would immediately stop the export of pork depressing the price of pork, beef, and poultry, as well as depress grain exports abroad. Collectively, this is estimated to cost US agriculture \$16.5B during the first year.

- ▶ Minnesota has animal welfare laws and enforcement entities in this state that are more than adequate to address any concerns intended to be addressed by the Companion Animal Board. The authority for enforcing these statutes already lies with the Minnesota Federated Humane Societies that is charged with investigating animal welfare issues in the state (MN Stat.343.22).
- ▶ The funding mechanism and distribution of funds being proposed in the bill are also extremely questionable and unusual for a newly created state agency. The bill states that the Companion Animal Board can accept monies from anywhere, including special interest groups or entities of interest to the members of the Companion Animal Board itself. The Companion Animal Board would also have the authority to distribute funding to any entity, including entities of interest to the members of the Companion Animal Board itself. This is a direct conflict of interest and should not be allowed.
- ▶ This bill includes rule-making authority. With the broad scope definition of a “companion animal” and far-reaching aspects of the language, this new board would be able to make rules that may affect our state’s poultry flocks and livestock herds. Rather than relying on the owner or manager of animals, the livestock and poultry industry may be subject to new additional rules and regulations.

About the Board of Animal Health

- ▶ Manages the health and well-being of commercial dogs and cats in Minnesota through inspections of pet breeders.
- ▶ Recently has created a new Breeder Excellence Program to recognize quality breeders in Minnesota.
- ▶ Manages reportable diseases, many of which are zoonotic, of dogs and cats such as *Brucella canis* and tularemia.
- ▶ Administers companion animal health certificates and has the authority to deny entry of certain animals or disease conditions into the state.
- ▶ Has been protecting the health and welfare of companion animals in the state for over 100 years.
- ▶ Has a long and established working relationship with the faculty and expertise available at the University of Minnesota College of Veterinary Medicine and its Veterinary Medical Center, and the UMN Veterinary Diagnostic Lab and staff and established working relationships with the Minnesota Department of Health, Minnesota Department of Agriculture, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, as well as many other state and federal agencies. In addition, it has long-standing relationships with other animal and livestock groups.
- ▶ Recently developed a task force which is gathering data on companion animals coming into the state, to better understand animal health and possible human health concerns.

