

Re: SB 51 / HB 144

Good morning,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide information on the role the Board of Veterinary Examiners provides in Alaska. The Board of Veterinary Examiners provides a valuable service to the public and to the veterinary professionals working in Alaska. The board ensures safe and quality veterinary services are provided to the citizens of Alaska and their animals. Functions of the board include: licensing qualified individuals to practice veterinary medicine in the state; set standards relating to the practice of veterinary medicine; and enforce the Veterinary Licensing Act, including investigating and resolving complaints. Their role does not extend to addressing the lack of service in rural communities.

There are many areas of Alaska that lack general veterinary services and specific services for livestock or food producing animals. This is a major problem that many states across the nation are facing. In Alaska, we are trying to address this issue in a number of ways. As an example, the Office of the State Veterinarian has been working through the National Institute of Food and Agriculture's (NIFA) Veterinary Medical Loan Repayment Program (<https://www.nifa.usda.gov/program/veterinary-medicine-loan-repayment-program>), to attract veterinarians to the state. The program is designed to repay educational loans of veterinarians who serve in areas with a veterinarian shortage for a period of three years.

Having adequate veterinary service for domestic pets in all communities is a challenging issue for Alaska as well as with livestock veterinarians. The work of non-profit organizations like Alaska Rural Veterinary Outreach, Alaska Native Rural Veterinary, Inc., Christian Veterinary Mission and others have been working to address this problem. Additionally, there are some private veterinarians that do run some clinics in remote communities. Currently there is research being done by the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium to evaluate the animal health and public health risks associated with this lack of veterinary service.

I strongly support the extension of the Board of Veterinary Examiners. Again, note that their work is not to promote veterinary service in certain areas of the state, but to ensure that the veterinary services provided to all communities across the Alaska are of the highest quality and meet standards of the veterinary profession.

Thank you,

Robert F Gerlach, VMD
Alaska State Veterinarian

Biosecurity: *Keeping Alaskan Livestock Healthy
and Food Safe*

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