

Representative Foster and House Finance Committee:

I'm president of PAWS of Nome, which is an animal welfare 501c3 non-profit that focuses on removing barriers to access for quality-of-life resources that reduce public health and safety hazards in rural communities. This bill is an important step in the right direction to address the issues I've chosen to take on in my career path of Animal Care/Control in rural Alaska.

I wanted to pass along the important factors of HB-258 that need to be highlighted as the top priority for considerations involved in its implementation. When I called in to provide public testimony on the matter, I heard some concerning comments from the Office of the State Veterinarian to amend the bill to reimburse veterinarians at "full cost" and that procedures need to be performed only by in-state/Alaska vets exclusively.

As a person who has made a successful career as a philanthropist building quality-of-life resource access for the Bering Strait Region and beyond, I can say that the old days of "small town" veterinarians are long gone and we have been unable to keep up with the needs using that framework of mind. I can tell you that the non-profit model PAWS of Nome utilizes, which is high-quality free access statewide, is what is helping keep the overpopulation down, communicable disease outbreaks at bay, and the rate of suffering/neglect from exploding. PAWS of Nome, and groups like ours, hosts non-profit teams that consist of staff members from Alaska and beyond. We are experiencing a national and statewide veterinarian shortage - we should not be finding ways to limit the number of professionals our residents have access to.

HB-258 was proposed because the entire state, including the existing practicing veterinarians, are at max capacity and people/animal suffering is on the rise due to preventable causes. We recently held a high-volume 3-day veterinary clinic here in Nome, and had almost 90 participants from across the region.

I asked the vet, even if all these people could afford to pay for the services your team is providing, how long would it have taken you to accommodate this patient list in a real-time every day clinic...he said 18 MONTHS. A vast majority of people cannot afford veterinary care (even minimum) for their pets, let alone to wait that long for an appointment...The continued lack of access will put those pets at risk for becoming contributors to our problems of over-population and communicable diseases. Additionally, it's already been proven that the existing clinics and veterinarians currently practicing in the state are not enough to meet the needs of our reality. Trying to redirect funding to for-profit services and limit the staff is not conducive to removing barriers to access for at-risk populations.

The reality is, NON-PROFITS need the support from this House Bill - it is intended to support and empower the continued work that meets the needs of the at-risk population. Alaska Animal Welfare Groups are the ones paying not only thousands of dollars to for-profit veterinarians every year, but also funding the high-volume events that are game

changers for the people gaining access to them. There has been a dangerous narrative lately that non-profit efforts somehow have a negative effect on for-profit veterinary clinics and the livelihoods of their teams. I want to assure you, and anyone this letter makes it to...for-profit clinics are already operating at max capacity and have patient schedules packed with clients that find a way to afford their services. The efforts of HB-258 are for the people who can't even hope to dream to afford their services...who wouldn't be getting access any other way than through a non-profit effort. How does it make sense to streamline a non-profit effort through a for-profit middle man, when there are so many non-profit teams already doing the work and building something that can accommodate ALL rather than SOME.

Please be part of a sustainable solution that helps meet the nearest and greatest need for our at-risk populations. We, as those on the frontlines for providing these resources, need your support of HB-258 to keep it on the track for successful implementation and to have the effect intended by those who wrote and rallied behind it.

Emily Stotts



PAWS of Nome

People for Animal Welfare and Safety

501 (c)(3) Non-Profit

Dedicated to providing non-profit support for animal-related needs in rural Northwest Alaska.

www.pawsofnome.org