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January 24, 2012

Alaska House of Representatives
State Capitol
Juneau, AK 99801

RE: HSVMA Support for House Bill 251

Dear Legislators:

The Humane Society Veterinary Medical Association is a national veterinary medical association with a focus on animal health and welfare. One of HSVMA's missions is to provide veterinary medical care to animals in need in remote areas of the United States as well as abroad. During 2011, HSVMA's Rural Area Veterinary Services, or RAVS program, provided high-quality health care to more than 8,600 animals in communities otherwise lacking access to these essential services.

HSVMA is supportive of House Bill 251 and its goal of addressing the lack of veterinary care available to the remote populations in Alaska. We also recognize the difficulty in addressing the needs of these populations given current veterinary licensing laws which limit those who can serve these remote populations to veterinarians licensed in Alaska. The lack of care is not only an issue for the well being of the animals but poses significant public health concerns for the remote communities.

HSVMA has worked to address similar issues on American Indian Reservations throughout the United States. At the request of the communities, RAVS strives to provide high-quality free veterinary care and education on many of these reservations with the goals of decreasing infectious and zoonotic disease transmission, providing population control through sterilization surgeries, limiting stray dog populations, and decreasing dog bites and the need for rabies prophylaxis in human victims. RAVS is an excellent example of how an above standard quality of care can be practiced in atypical settings providing services to a population that would not be able to otherwise seek care.

While we absolutely do not believe that standard of care should be compromised in rural or low cost settings, we think it is critical to recognize the requirements to practice high quality veterinary medicine and have an open mind in assessing rural situations as they may meet these requirements in creative, yet safe and effective, ways.

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We hope the bill addresses this need by allowing veterinary practitioners with up-to-date and in good standing licenses in the United States to be permitted to volunteer their services under the laws set by the Alaska Board of Veterinary Medicine and the State of Alaska. These services should be allowed in areas of documented need where veterinary care is geographically or financially unavailable to the population receiving the service.

In closing, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to present HSVMA support for the goals of HB 251 and hope this legislation will result in increased veterinary medical care for underserved animal populations in Alaska.

Sincerely,

Morgan R. Peterman, DVM
Veterinary Field Director
Rural Area Veterinary Services
Humane Society Veterinary Medical Association