

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE**  
**HOUSE LABOR AND COMMERCE STANDING COMMITTEE**

March 23, 2012

3:24 p.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Representative Kurt Olson, Chair  
Representative Craig Johnson, Vice Chair  
Representative Mike Chenault  
Representative Dan Saddler  
Representative Lindsey Holmes  
Representative Bob Miller

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

Representative Steve Thompson

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

HOUSE BILL NO. 251

"An Act relating to the Board of Veterinary Examiners and the practice of veterinary medicine."

- HEARD & HELD

HOUSE BILL NO. 300

"An Act relating to geographic cost-of-living salary adjustments for justices of the supreme court and judges of the superior and district courts; and providing for an effective date."

- BILL HEARING CANCELED

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

BILL: HB 251

SHORT TITLE: PRACTICE OF VETERINARY MEDICINE

SPONSOR(S): REPRESENTATIVE(S) DICK, JOULE

01/17/12	(H)	PREFILE RELEASED 1/6/12
01/17/12	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/17/12	(H)	L&C, FIN
01/20/12	(H)	SPONSOR SUBSTITUTE INTRODUCED
01/20/12	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/20/12	(H)	L&C, FIN
02/15/12	(H)	L&C AT 3:15 PM BARNES 124
02/15/12	(H)	Scheduled But Not Heard

02/20/12 (H) L&C AT 3:15 PM BARNES 124  
02/20/12 (H) Heard & Held  
02/20/12 (H) MINUTE(L&C)  
03/23/12 (H) L&C AT 3:15 PM BARNES 124

**WITNESS REGISTER**

ANNETTE KREITZER, Staff  
Representative Alan Dick  
Alaska State Legislature  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Explained the changes in the proposed committee substitute for HB 251, Version R, on behalf of the sponsor, Representative Alan Dick.

DIANE PREZIOSI, Veterinarian  
Alaska Veterinary Specialists of Alaska  
President, Alaska Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA)  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified during the discussion of HB 251.

ROCKY L. JAMES  
Gwichyaa Zhee Gwich'in Tribal Government  
Fort Yukon, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified during the discussion of HB 251.

JAMES DELKER, Veterinarian;  
Past President  
Alaska Veterinary Medical Association  
Soldotna, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified during the discussion of HB 251.

KEN HILL, Veterinarian  
Waterways Veterinary Clinic  
Petersburg, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified during the discussion of HB 251.

JIM LEACH, Veterinarian  
Trail Doc  
Big Lake, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified during the discussion HB 251.

HAYDEN NEVILL, Veterinarian  
Fairbanks, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified during the discussion of HB 251.

SARAH LOVE, Veterinarian

Veterinary Internal Medicine of Alaska  
Fairbanks, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified during the discussion HB 251.

GERALD RILEY  
Nenana, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of HB 251.

HAROLD DAVID  
Allakaket, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified during the discussion of HB 251.

VICKI MOYLE, Executive Director  
Nenana Council on Aging  
Nenana, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of HB 251.

LORRAINE LANDERS  
Fairbanks, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of HB 251.

LINDA JOHNSON  
Manley Hot Springs, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified during the discussion of HB 251.

TOM KNUDSON  
Fort Yukon, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified during the discussion of HB 251.

GREGORY TAYLOR  
Rampart, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of HB 251.

PAM REDDINGTON  
Manley Hot Springs, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified during the discussion of HB 251.

#### **ACTION NARRATIVE**

[3:24:07 PM](#)

**CHAIR KURT OLSON** called the House Labor and Commerce Standing Committee meeting to order at 3:24 p.m. Representatives Miller, Chenault, Johnson, Saddler, and Olson were present at the call to order. Representative Holmes arrived as the meeting was in progress.

**HB 251-PRACTICE OF VETERINARY MEDICINE**

[3:24:28 PM](#)

CHAIR OLSON announced that the only order of business would be SPONSOR SUBSTITUTE FOR HOUSE BILL NO. 251, "An Act relating to the Board of Veterinary Examiners and the practice of veterinary medicine."

[3:24:59 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSON made a motion to adopt the proposed committee substitute (CS) for HB 251, labeled 27-LS1062\R, Martin, 3/20/12.

CHAIR OLSON objected for purpose of discussion. [Version R was before the committee.]

[3:25:21 PM](#)

ANNETTE KREITZER, Staff, Representative Alan Dick, Alaska State Legislature, explained the changes in the proposed CS for HB 251, Version R, as it relates to Version D. She noted that some concern had been expressed about the language "or country" on page 1, line 11 of Version D. This language has been deleted in Version R. She stated that Version R also deletes language that removed the veterinary board oversight of Alaska licensed veterinarians practicing uncompensated care. In other words, it would put veterinarians who are practicing uncompensated care back under the purview of the board. She stated that Version R deletes language limiting the Board to determine the license status of a person and deletes the immunity clause.

MS. KREITZER stated that Section 2 was confusing since there were two terms pertaining to nonmonetary compensation so the term "nonmonetary donations" was removed. Uncompensated practice does not include reimbursement for actual expenses or other nonmonetary consideration.

MS. KREITZER related that Version R deletes the language in Section 2 of Version D - with respect to the surrender and reinstatement of a license - as a result of testimony given at the last meeting. Additionally, the sponsor deleted the words "or experimental" from page 2, lines 22-26 of Version R. Version D had the language negligent conduct solely on the experimental or unconventional nature of the licensee's

practice. She explained that this language is in the medical statutes but it made some people uncomfortable.

MS. KREITZER stated that on page 3, lines 13-14 of Version R corrects a drafter's error which corrects that the notice of a complaint describing the allegation shall be sent to the licensee and not the complainant. Section 4 would create a new section that requires the Board of Veterinary Examiners (BVE), in conjunction with the Department of Commerce, Community and Economic Development (DCCED), to prepare a report on the availability of veterinary services in rural Alaska. She indicated the report is due to the legislature by December 31, 2012. The BVE must consult with the Alaska Federation of Natives (AFN) in preparing the report. She related that some testimony by veterinarians indicated that if the state would pay their way they would go to rural Alaska. The language in Version R says the solution should not be the expenditure of additional state funds.

[3:28:33 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MILLER commended the changes improved HB 251 considerably. He referred to page 1, Section 1, which states that veterinarians must work within the scope of their license. He referred to page 2, line 25, which speaks in terms of "... negligent conduct solely on the unconventional nature...." He related his understanding that if a veterinarian is practicing within the scope of their license, the language of unconventional would not really apply.

MS. KREITZER answered that there is a section that identifies the standard of care, which indicates basically what another veterinarian might do. She suggested that a veterinarian may be practicing within the scope of their practice, but the conventional nature aspect may differ between practitioners. She offered to identify the specific language for members.

[3:31:10 PM](#)

DIANE PREZIOSI, Veterinarian, Alaska Veterinary Specialists of Alaska; President, Alaska Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) stated that she graduated from the University of Missouri in 1992, and has practiced in Texas, Missouri, and Alaska. She has practiced as a small animal practitioner and has gone on to specialty practice in dermatology. She has also lectured to students, veterinarians, and lay people in Alaska. She said she has clients in Anchorage, Fairbanks, Matanuska-Susitna valley,

Delta Junction, Tok, Barrow, Nome, Bethel, Kodiak, Dutch Harbor, Haines, Petersburg, Juneau, Cordova, Valdez, and Kotzebue. She has flown to the Bush on one occasion with Dr. Jim Leach to see patients. She offered that she does pro bono work with the Alaska Zoo and Bird TLC in Anchorage. Speaking on behalf of the Alaska Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA), she stated that veterinarians take an oath, which reads, "to use our scientific knowledge and our skills for the benefit of society through the protection of animal health and welfare, the prevention and relief of animal suffering, the conservation of animal resources, the promotion of public health, and the advancement of medical knowledge." She indicated the AVMA supports any effort that brings better service to the citizens of Alaska who own animals no matter where they are. She related that the AVMA realizes some areas in Alaska are without fulltime veterinary care and small communities cannot support a fulltime veterinarian and may be reliant on fly-in services or other methods of care. Several veterinarians serve the larger rural communities off the road system, but that still leaves many smaller villages without adequate care. Although the AVMA would like to see all animals receive routine care, the AVMA cannot support a bill that erodes adequate standards of care. Under the current statutes and regulations, Article 2, AS 08.98.120, licensing is required in the state when a veterinarian practices in Alaska.

[3:34:42 PM](#)

DR. PREZIOSI stated that Section 4 establishes standards for the practice of veterinary medicine under the powers and duties of the BVE. Ms. Kreitzer discussed the standards of care such that veterinarians approach a medical or surgical case in various ways.

The committee took a brief at-ease due to technical difficulties.

[3:35:39 PM](#)

DR. PREZIOSI continued. She said she thought some misconceptions exist with respect to veterinarians providing care. Further, she stated that some people thought a veterinarian would be prosecuted for handling a case in a specific manner; however, she related there are many ways to provide veterinarian care. She also thought there has been some misconception about veterinarians providing oversight over other veterinarians, but that simply is not the case.

DR. PREZIOSI referred to proposed Section 1 [of Version R], which would allow a veterinarian not licensed in Alaska to practice in the state so long as they were not compensated by wages. She said this would not ensure the veterinarian is licensed or is in good standing in another state. She explained that a mechanism currently exists to verify a veterinarian's licensure and standing in another state; however, this control would be lost under the bill. She reiterated that this bill does not provide any assurance the person volunteering to provide veterinary care in Alaska is in good standing in another jurisdiction.

3:37:30 PM

DR. PREZIOSI questioned how an owner could make a complaint if the veterinarian is not registered in the state. She also asked how an owner could get copies of a record or a prescription. She further asked and who would pay for any investigation of volunteer veterinarians. She then indicated the BVE and licensees' fees pay for the BVE and any investigations. Further, the AVMA believes it is unjust to use Alaska veterinarians' license fees to support those who are allowed to practice without paying any fees, particularly since the veterinarians' license fees are already high. She related that monetary compensation is still undefined for such compensation as a hunt, a cabin, or a plane ride. She questioned the reason these volunteer veterinarians are absolved from licensure. She further questioned how voluntary veterinarians' activities would be monitored to ensure they are confined to the rural areas and do not practice in Anchorage, Juneau, Fairbanks, or the Kenai Peninsula.

3:39:00 PM

DR. PREZIOSI referred to proposed Section 2 [Version R] of the bill with respect to the grounds for imposition of disciplinary sanctions. She reported the AVMA has numerous concerns. She said that just because repeated professional incompetence has not yet harmed an animal does not mean it will never be a problem. She related a scenario in which a person could spay animals using unsterilized equipment, which she said will eventually cause a problem. She predicted that it may not kill the first animal, but eventually an animal will die due to poor surgical procedures. She questioned whether it is necessary to wait for an animal's death from poor practice before taking action. She stated that adding gross negligence and negligent

misconduct seems to raises the bar significantly to prove incompetence making it very difficult to prosecute. She indicated that the term "unconventional" is not defined and should be or other language should be inserted to indicate the term will be defined by the BVE.

[3:40:28 PM](#)

DR. PREZIOSI remarked that veterinarians do not police another veterinarian's cases. She pointed out the varied practices, including that some veterinarians employ homeopathy, acupuncture, and Chinese herbal remedies, in addition to Western medicine. Many would consider these practices as unconventional; however, the veterinarians using Western medicine do not try to police those who choose less conventional forms of medical therapies although veterinarians do expect standards to be followed. She suggested that having the term "unconventional" defined by the BVE would be consistent with AS 08.98.050, which gives the board the authority to establish standards for the practice of veterinary medicine.

[3:41:28 PM](#)

DR. PREZIOSI referred to proposed Section 3 of HB 251, which relates to complaints, investigations, and hearings for veterinarians. She offered that this provision establishes guidelines for complaints and subsequent handling of the complaints, which could be beneficial. She outlined the AVMA's concerns. She questioned, specifically, which entity is responsible for expenses for interviews under oath for all the outlying parties. Additionally, she suggested the limitation on who can lodge a complaint can be problematic. She indicated if a trend of misconduct is suspected by someone not directly involved in the care or ownership of the animals in question. She related a scenario in which an animal is spayed in the Bush, but the ureter is tied off during the surgery. She said the animal will die within the next week. She questioned whether the owner will understand the reason the animal died and who will report the veterinarian's poor performance. She reiterated that under HB 251 only the owner can report the complaint, but if someone associated with the animal or in the village sees a pattern these people will have no right or recourse to report the problem.

[3:43:05 PM](#)

DR. PREZIOSI turned to proposed Section 4 of HB 251. She stated that the AVMA would support any ongoing dialogue to address veterinary needs in Bush Alaska. She said AS 08.98.050 (7), reads, "As requested by the department, monitor the standards and availability of veterinary services provided in the state and report its findings to the department." She reiterated that this is current statute. She suggested that the proposed language that requests the report on availability of veterinary services in rural Alaska seems redundant except it requires the information by [December 31, 2012] and asks the BVE to consult with AFN when preparing the report. She asked if the board should also be consulting with the Alaska Veterinary Medical Association and the Interior Veterinary Medical Association. She reported that there is also a newly formed group, the Alaska Rural Veterinary Outreach, who seeks to bring care to rural communities. She questioned who will pay for the proposed study. She wondered in the event HB 251 passes whose funds will be spent and how the veterinarian services will be delivered to the Bush.

[3:44:35 PM](#)

DR. PREZIOSI pointed out that veterinarians under the bill are not licensed in the state and cannot legally give rabies vaccinations. She stated that these "not for compensation" veterinarians will not be covered under other states' statutes related to licensed veterinarians. She concluded that the issues present significant health concerns that impact not only animal public health but also human health and welfare. She stated that the AVMA believes this bill could ultimately be a disservice to Alaskans by opening the door to substandard veterinary care. She related that the AVMA is eager to work with any interested group to provide qualify veterinary care in rural Alaska.

[3:45:45 PM](#)

ROCKY L. JAMES, Gwichyaa Zhee Gwich'in Tribal Government, testified in support of veterinarians providing services in rural villages in Alaska. He said he consulted with community members via the radio and heard back from them. He reported the current animal count in Fort Yukon is 178 dogs and 3 cats. He added that Fort Yukon will also have some chickens this summer. Most of the concerns expressed by villagers are related to a desire to have licensed veterinarians come to the village to administer rabies shots, document the dogs, and spay dogs. The villagers also expressed concern that lots of dogs not

registered since the dogs must be sent to Fairbanks to do so and to receive medicines if they are sick or injured. He thanked the committee for considering HB 251. He related his understanding that some veterinarians would like to perform services in rural Alaska and this bill would make it easier to work with the Alaska Federation of Natives (AFN) to find solutions for veterinary care. He reported that about three years ago a veterinarian visited and performed services. Further about 30 years ago, Johnny Thomas, who worked for the Tanana Chiefs Conference (TCC), was trained to administer rabies shots and kept records. Mr. Thomas traveled to Circle, Arctic Village, Venetia, Beaver, and Stevens Village to reduce rabies and parvovirus incidence. He concluded by stating that the Gwichyaa Zhee Gwich'in Tribal Government and community would like to see the bill pass.

[3:49:52 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MILLER asked him to describe the general result of having visiting veterinarians come to the village and perform routine services.

MR. JAMES answered that he personally has three dogs, but one died last summer. He stated that the village had the facilities to accommodate the veterinarians. He reported that the community was very supportive and paid the airline fares for the veterinarian. Additionally, the experience was educational for Fort Yukon students since they were invited to participate in documenting the dogs and cats in the village. He said at least one or two students wanted to continue with veterinarian services. However, the veterinary service has stopped and the village is concerned about diseases the dogs may contract, which could easily spread.

[3:52:01 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MILLER related his understanding that the voluntary veterinarian did an adequate job and satisfied the villagers and documented the animals.

MR. JAMES answered that the villager was very satisfied with the work. He noted that there may even be more than 178 dogs in the village as he may have missed some.

CHAIR OLSON inquired as to why there are only three cats in the village.

MR. JAMES concluded by thanking the committee and hoped for progress. He offered to inform the community about today's hearing.

[3:53:39 PM](#)

JAMES DELKER, Veterinarian, Past President; Alaska Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA), stated he is providing follow-up testimony to Dr. Preziosi, who outlined the AVMA's concerns very well. He reiterated some concerns, noting Section 2 and 3 of the bill are protective of veterinarians and make it more restrictive to pursue disciplinary actions against veterinarian malpractice across the state. He emphasized that ethically the veterinarians are concerned with adequately protecting rights of Alaskans to lodge complaints for medical malpractice within veterinary medicine. While some parts of Section 2 and 3 of HB are appealing at first glance, he said he was uncertain whether the provisions are in the best interests of Alaskans. He specifically referred to Section 4 and said he was unsure if a study is really necessary.

[3:56:04 PM](#)

DR. DELKER offered his belief everyone is aware that rural Alaska needs services and the debate currently is focused on how to best provide the necessary services and the financial support. He acknowledged that the standards of care can happen in field medicine. He said it seems apparent from Section 4 that state funds would not be used so the hurdle is how to obtain the funds. He questioned whether nonprofits would provide the funding. He suggested that the Alaska Rural Veterinary Outreach, Inc. (ARVO) is probably the best organization to address the rural veterinary care issue. He recalled other organizations have tried to provide similar services in rural Alaska, but the formula ARVO uses includes using Alaska veterinarians licensed in the state. He offered his belief this will avoid many issues and problems surrounding providing rural veterinary care using volunteer veterinarians not licensed in Alaska. He indicated issues have arisen by using Lower 48 veterinarians since they provide periodic care and may come in once or twice a year to communities with little follow-up care. He pointed out that the ARVO is working to set up a process for periodic service, follow-up care, and phone support outside the veterinarians' visits. He applauded the sponsor's intentions by introducing HB 251 and commended the sponsor and staff for their intentions.

3:58:31 PM

KEN HILL, Veterinarian, Waterways Veterinary Clinic, stated that he has a rural veterinary practice that serves communities of Cordova, Petersburg, Wrangell, Thorne Bay, Elfin Cove, Haines, Skagway, and Hoonah. He related in his experience that offering free veterinary services in areas in which other veterinarians have established a practice can be very disruptive to veterinary practices. He explained that the voluntary veterinarians often perform spays, neuters, and vaccinations, which can be disruptive to the established veterinarian since they are uncertain which services communities will need until they arrive, yet the veterinarian incurs the same travel costs to the communities. He suggested that members should be cautious about allowing volunteer veterinarians to provide services in areas with an established rural practice since it does not serve the communities at all when someone else comes in. He offered his belief that the work tends to be spotty and does not provide the full range of veterinary services. He described his practice, such that he performs spays, neuters, vaccinations, performs surgeries, dentistry, prevention, problem solves, including anticipating problems the animals may develop. He said the continuity of care is lacking with volunteer veterinarians since the same veterinarian may not visit the communities.

4:02:40 PM

DR. HILL elaborated that he usually brings in substantial equipment, including anesthesia, dentistry, and surgical unit important for more complicated surgeries to rural communities. He related that if a veterinarian visited Fort Yukon or another community that he/she would be able to do some of the more complicated surgeries if the veterinarian had the same kind of equipment. He offered his belief that a volunteer would not likely include this type of service. He emphasized the importance of having more specialized services offered by a veterinarian who knows the communities' needs.

4:04:04 PM

DR. HILL recalled Mr. James mentioning in earlier testimony the importance of documentation. He offered that he brings computers and enters all the records of animals and documents any rabies and distemper shots administered. Additionally, he can provide copies of these records upon request by the owner or referral. He doubted whether a visiting veterinarian from another state could do so, as well as whether they could also

provide telephone follow-up consultations. He concluded by stating that type of care would be reduced by volunteer veterinarians.

4:06:02 PM

JIM LEACH, Veterinarian, Trail Doc, said he has been in practice for a number of years and is licensed in numerous other states, including Missouri and California, which gives him varied experience. He stated that he initially came to Alaska in the early 70s and his practice extended from Nome to Eagle and from Seward to Bethel via airplane travel. He reported that he has held clinics in communities on the Aleutian Chain and in Yakutat. He offered his belief that two separate issues have arisen - nonlicensed care and providing service to outlying communities. He offered during his 35 years of offering veterinary services to rural Alaska that he has had very good relationships with villagers, including that many help organize his clinics and assist on clinic day. He acknowledged one of the difficulties is the cost of travel since aviation gas is so costly. He recalled earlier testimony from a villager in Fort Yukon indicating the village paid for a round-trip ticket for the veterinarian to travel. He suggested that Section 4 of HB 251 could be amended if villages could provide some compensation for travel.

4:09:25 PM

DR. LEACH stated that much of Alaska's veterinary care is unique. He said normal care is given at a veterinary hospital, but that type of facility is not available in the Bush so care is handled differently. He suggested a non-Alaskan veterinarian may not understand how to handle vaccines to ensure they are still viable vaccines. He expressed concern about non-licensed veterinarians practicing in the state, which is a serious matter since without BVE's licensure and oversight non-Alaskan veterinarians may not understand the difficulties in providing veterinarian services in rural Alaska. He further suggested veterinarians in the state should work directly with villagers rather than through AFN to address their needs. He also expressed concern about the lack oversight by the BVE. He acknowledged the veterinary service is needed but pointed out it is costly to fund the village clinics and that issue needs to be addressed.

4:12:13 PM

HAYDEN NEVILL, Veterinarian, agreed the veterinary care needs is significant in rural Alaska. He stated that HB 251 has significant problems. He offered his belief that the bill's sponsor does not have a good grasp of what standard of care means. He stated that removing the word "experimental" does not resolve the issue of people not being informed in instances in which the animal is receiving unusual treatment. He suggested that as a veterinarian it is his responsibility to inform clients if they are receiving unconventional treatment. Alaskans have the right to know if their pets are getting unconventional treatment, he said. He highlighted that the bill would limit reporting requirements which guts some protections Alaskans have. He related his understanding that HB 251 does not protect people against dangerous drugs used in food animals, inactive rabies vaccines being used, or controlled drugs not being handled properly resulting in the drugs ending up on the street. The bill would require that the BVE make a report to the AFN, which he agreed is a great idea. He suggested that if the BVE is required to do this that the funding should also be available to cover the expenses of that report.

[4:13:57 PM](#)

DR. NEVILL remarked that the no bill will fix the problem of poor veterinary care in the villages. He offered his belief that the issue of rural veterinary care is not a legislative issue but one of people needing to work together. He suggested that the AFN and other interested groups work with the Alaska Veterinary Association (AVA) to organize and hold clinics in villages. He highlighted that plenty of interested parties could hold clinics, including the ARVO and other people who take a professional approach to veterinary care. He emphasized that this problem is not a legislative issue and continuing to pursue this bill is a waste of resources. He concluded that there are better ways to address the problem of veterinary care in the villages.

[4:14:57 PM](#)

SARAH LOVE, Veterinarian, Veterinary Internal Medicine of Alaska, stated that she is a small animal veterinary internist who practices in Fairbanks and Anchorage. She did not wish to repeat testimony, but offered to highlight some important points. She said everyone is aware rural health care is an important issue, but it is a huge undertaking, even in areas as close to larger communities, such as Fort Yukon. She referred to Section 1 of HB 251 and suggested the committee further

evaluate other Alaska boards and professions, such as law, medicine and dentistry, with respect to unlicensed practice. She offered her belief that these professions would not allow professionals from other states to practice in Alaska without consent and oversight. She characterized that infringement as demeaning to the veterinary profession as a whole. She stated that no veterinarian she knows would expect to practice in another state without licensure.

[4:16:32 PM](#)

DR. LOVE referred to Section 2 of HB 251 would allow any individual licensed by the BVE has the right to maintain his/her license or not. She related that individuals could surrender or allow their licenses to lapse without consequence, regardless of their standing with the board, which she supported. However, she questioned whether this bill was written with a single individual in mind. She said she did not believe that laws should be changed to address the needs of one person. She referred to Section 3 of the bill, which further defines professional incompetence, which would allow for a broad interpretation of the term and could lead to unacceptable and possibly unethical care. She related the committee discussed the term "unconventional" as it pertains to a clinical setting in urban Alaska. This bill does not give permission for substandard care to occur in rural Alaska. She acknowledged that veterinarians must make do and are very creative in developing their field practices, but to allow substandard practices to, take place simply due to location is unacceptable.

[4:18:01 PM](#)

DR. LOVE referred to Section 4 of HB 251 and stated that no Alaskan should be prevented from making a complaint. She emphasized that any citizen - and not just the owner - should be able to make complaints to the board. She pointed out that significant public health concerns could arise. Further, additional reporting may not be necessary since some services are availability, but the important thing is to figure out how to get services to rural Alaska and fund them. She has worked in rural Alaska as a veterinarian and as an educator. She characterized the veterinary needs as huge and the issue as complex, but holding veterinarians to a sensible standard of care and allowing protection for Alaska's animals and citizens is of utmost importance. She offered her belief that this bill does not address this.

4:19:09 PM

GERALD RILEY stated that he is an Alaskan Native musher, fisherman, and has worked as a captain on push boats. He said he is an elder from Nenana and would like to speak in support of HB 251 since he is concerned about the dangerous lack of veterinary care in remote Native communities. He suggested that most of the rural communities go several years between veterinary visits. He highlighted that it has been three or four years since Nenana has had a visiting veterinarian. Many of the same communities without veterinary care have had their rabies vaccination program cut by the state since 2007, which leaves these communities completely unprotected and vulnerable to disease. He related that TCC cannot help either. He predicted that if HB 251 does not pass the situation will not get any better so the community cannot drop the issue. When there is a lack of veterinarian care disease and parasites can spread to people. He concluded by saying that Nenana should not have to beg for these life-saving services.

4:20:42 PM

HAROLD DAVID stated that his community is in a similar circumstance as Fort Yukon and other rural areas that lack veterinary services. The village has had to pay to have veterinarian services. He said he is a local dog musher, and along with other members of the Dog Musers Association have close to 200 dogs in the village. He expressed concern about an increase in diseases, such as parvo that have been killing off the pups. He also expressed concern that the village needs veterinary care to sustain healthy dogs that can produce good pups. He concluded that the village needs veterinarians to come to the village just as Fort Yukon and Nenana residents testified. He urged members to support HB 251.

4:22:57 PM

VICKI MOYLE, Executive Director, Nenana Council on Aging, related that the council cares for the elderly and disabled, many of whom have pets. She stated that they previously had a rural veterinarian visit and set up a clinic near the senior center. She recalled the last visit was in 2009. She said she wrote letter to BVE to point out their needs, but she did not receive an answer. She recalled that the prior veterinarian had some grant money that would help cover costs to neuter and spay. He gave immunizations, cleaned animal's teeth, provided spay and neuter services - sometimes without charging a fee. He also

performed surgery in sterile environments. She offered her belief that comparing the quality of care between rural and urban Alaska is like comparing apples and oranges. Since Nenana does not have veterinarian services, the community has experienced an increase in unwanted pups and stray dogs. She pointed out that many people live on fixed income and the cost of gasoline is high. She offered her belief that instead of taking their animals to health care, often times they go without care. She recalled earlier testimony about visiting veterinarians. She pointed out that when the veterinarian visited her community experienced fewer strays, records were kept, the veterinarian provided diagnostics and surgeries, and an assistant kept records. She characterized the previous program as a good one. She emphasized that no one has been able to fill the gap once their veterinarian stopped coming. She acknowledged funding as an issue. She recalled that some people would pay more to cover the costs of those that could not pay for services. She concluded her testimony by offering that the when her community had veterinarian services the number of strays were reduced drastically, the animals received much better care, and the veterinarian was respected. She remarked that some people will always complain. She offered her support and the support of her clients for HB 251. She asked members to look at the positive things in the bill since it all boils down to a need for care in rural communities.

[4:28:11 PM](#)

LORRAINE LANDERS stated that she is a musher, but also works in the Indian Health Services system. She testified in support of HB 251. She did not want to repeat testimony, but echoed a longstanding argument of why things are done differently in Alaska. She stated that some arguments used against this bill are ones that have been used against establishing programs for community and dental health aides. She said that community and dental health aide programs have had a great deal of success and has translated to people receiving consistent standards of care in villages. She suggested that animals need to have similar care. She argued against imposing stricter standards for veterinary care in villages. She said she also considers veterinary care as a public health care issue since the incidence of rabies continues to climb in Alaska. Additionally, more children have been bitten by an excessive number of animals in the villages. She finds that some people feel disenfranchised and neglected since they suffer with their animals. She related a scenario in which a child is very attached to dog and the dog gets parvovirus or rabies, but there

is not a veterinarian in the village to euthanize an animal the only option is to kill the animal. Thus children are impacted in big ways and the memories linger. She emphasized that this situation creates a level of desperation and unless a person has lived through the experience cannot know what it feels like. She emphasized that things become desperate at times especially since this is a state and country with resources. She viewed HB 251 as a prescriptive formula for future care. She recalled she once had a dog with an eye infection and went to the hospital for advice. The hospital staff suggested that she clean her dog's eyes with baby shampoo and that solution worked and how wonderful it was to have her dog's eyes fixed. She related that she had called veterinarians long distance for advice, but they were not able to help her since the veterinarians could not see the dog. She then said, "That is not helpful." She asked the committee to please consider HB 251, which would allow people to be empowered since so many animals are part of our families.

[4:34:04 PM](#)

LINDA JOHNSON stated she is a small kennel owner and recreational musher. She asked to testify in support of HB 251. She said the bill is long overdue and is a step in the right direction. She said it has been interesting to listen to the veterinarians. She asked to thank the villagers for their testimony. She agreed with Ms. Landers and Ms. Moyle's comments. She witnessed a veterinarian who held a clinic, performed surgeries, vaccinations, and did a professional job, which the community appreciated. She predicted that if it were left up to the veterinarians in Alaska, Manley Hot Springs would not have any help whatsoever. She pointed out that she respects veterinarians and has used them in Fairbanks and Anchorage, but none of them are able to help her community. She stated that HB 251 is a step in the right direction. She related her understanding that money is an issue, but it should not prevent the issue from moving forward. She said she hopes the committee will consider the needs of the people in rural Alaska. She predicted that if the veterinary care issues are not addressed that people will get ill and it will ultimately affect human health.

[4:36:59 PM](#)

TOM KNUDSON stated that he owns sled dog with health problems, including that the dog has blood in its feces. He said he called four veterinarians in Fairbanks for advice in treating his dog. He said he let them know he would be glad to sign a

hold harmless letter, but he still did not get help. He said his dog is lying on the rug right now. He related his understanding that it is just a matter of time before his dog dies. He pointed out that what goes on in Fairbanks is different from what happens in his village.

CHAIR OLSON responded that he is also a dog owner so he understands how he feels.

[4:38:31 PM](#)

GREGORY TAYLOR stated that he is an Alaska fisherman and dog musher. He asked to testify in support of HB 251. He thinks this bill will help communities.

[4:39:46 PM](#)

PAM REDDINGTON stated that she has been a dog musher for many years. She asked to testify in support of HB 251. She explained that veterinary care in rural areas very important especially in areas not on road system. She acknowledged the cost and time involved to try to get animals to veterinary care. She emphasized the importance to have veterinarians come to the villages. She said it has been over six years since her community has had veterinary care. She commented that the veterinary care was excellent and people depended on the veterinarian. She said the legislature needs to work with AFN on this bill in order to have a better standard of care in rural Alaska. She stressed that this is not just about care standards for animals but also for humans.

[4:41:42 PM](#)

MR. TAYLOR said he does not understand why private veterinarians are so threatened by HB 251. He said that the villages sometimes go years without veterinary care. He said, "Everyone in the world supports this bill except a small group of business owners." He listed AFN, Doyon, Limited, TCC, Fairbanks Native Association and the Humane Society as supportive of the bill. He thanked the legislature for protecting the rural communities from the obviously greedy people who oppose HB 251. He offered his belief that the BVE and its supporters do not care about standards, but only care about protecting their pocketbooks. He reiterated his concern that the BVE is self-serving and self-interested. He said if HB 251 does not pass it lends support to establish a rural veterinary board to represent rural Alaskans. He hopes his legislative representatives support the people. He

further thought that the veterinarians put more effort towards opposing the bill than to help protect rural Alaskans.

4:44:13 PM

CHAIR OLSON, after first determining no one else wished to testify, closed public testimony on HB 251.

[HB 251 was held over.]

4:44:46 PM

**ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business before the committee, the House Labor and Commerce Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 4:44 p.m.