

# SENATE BILL REPORT

## SB 5621

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As Reported By Senate Committee On:  
Agriculture & International Trade, February 21, 2001

**Title:** An act relating to animal therapy.

**Brief Description:** Allowing certain health practitioners specializing in the treatment of animals to operate independently of veterinarians.

**Sponsors:** Senators Rasmussen, Sheahan, Shin, Roach, Constantine, Patterson, Prentice, Thibaudeau and Kohl-Welles.

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:** Agriculture & International Trade: 2/9/01, 2/21/01 [DPS].

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### SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE & INTERNATIONAL TRADE

**Majority Report:** That Substitute Senate Bill No. 5621 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Rasmussen, Chair; Shin, Vice Chair; Parlette, Sheahan, Snyder, Spanel and Swecker.

**Staff:** David Johnson (786-7754)

**Background:** The definition of veterinary practice includes prescribing or administering any treatment, method, or practice, and performing any manipulation on an animal. The Board of Veterinary Governors has concluded that providing massage treatments to animals for pay is a veterinary practice which is only to be done by a licensed veterinarian.

Massage practitioners must be licensed by the state to perform massage therapy. Massage is defined to include the external manipulation of pressure to soft tissue for therapeutic purposes. To obtain a license, the applicant must complete an approved course of study, an examination, and be 18 years old.

**Summary of Substitute Bill:** An individual who is licensed to practice massage therapy and who completes 100 hours of specialized training may apply for an endorsement to practice animal massage. The endorsement may be either for small animal or large animal massage.

Legislative findings as to the benefits of massage and endorsement by the Board of Massage are set forth. The board may adopt rules necessary to administer the endorsement process.

**Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:** The substitute bill replaced the more complex licensing categories of the original bill with just two endorsements, large and small animal massage practitioner. Only licensed massage practitioners are eligible for the endorsement.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Available.

**Effective Date:** Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

**Testimony For:** Animal massage can be a tremendous aid to injured, infirm, and hard working animals. There is a large demand for professional animal massage therapists, especially in the horse racing industry. This bill will not only fill a great need but also increase professionalism of the industry. Currently, to meet the demand, professional animal massage therapists are flown into the state. Practitioners qualified to treat humans should be qualified to treat animals. Animal massage is therapeutic only, it is not a substitute for a veterinarian's work.

**Testimony Against:** None.

**Testified:** PRO: Lola Michelin, Diane Morrison, Washington Animal Massage Society; Ralph Valla, Washington Thoroughbred Breeders Association; Jim Halstrom, Northwest Racing, Emerald Downs; CONCERNS: Greg Hanon, Washington State Veterinary Medical Association; Sue Shoblom, Department of Health; Melissa Johnson, Physical Therapy Association of Washington.