

# HOUSE BILL REPORT

## SSB 5004

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**As Passed House:**  
April 12, 2019

**Title:** An act relating to allowing animal care and control agencies and nonprofit humane societies to provide additional veterinary services to low-income households.

**Brief Description:** Allowing animal care and control agencies and nonprofit humane societies to provide additional veterinary services to low-income households.

**Sponsors:** Senate Committee on Health & Long Term Care (originally sponsored by Senators Cleveland, Rivers, Conway, Fortunato, Frockt, Palumbo, Rolfes, Saldaña and Kuderer).

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:**

Rural Development, Agriculture, & Natural Resources: 3/15/19, 4/2/19 [DP].

**Floor Activity:**

Passed House: 4/12/19, 77-18.

**Brief Summary of Substitute Bill**

- Expands the services that veterinarians and veterinary technicians employed by animal control agencies and nonprofit humane societies may provide to animals owned by low-income households.

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**HOUSE COMMITTEE ON RURAL DEVELOPMENT, AGRICULTURE, & NATURAL RESOURCES**

**Majority Report:** Do pass. Signed by 9 members: Representatives Blake, Chair; Shewmake, Vice Chair; Chapman, Fitzgibbon, Lekanoff, Orcutt, Pettigrew, Ramos and Springer.

**Minority Report:** Do not pass. Signed by 5 members: Representatives Chandler, Ranking Minority Member; Dye, Kretz, Schmick and Walsh.

**Staff:** Rebecca Lewis (786-7339).

**Background:**

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*This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.*

Animal care and control agencies and nonprofit humane societies registered with the Department of Health may provide limited veterinary care services for animals owned by qualified low-income households. Limited veterinary services are sterilization, vaccination, and electronic identification. These facilities may also provide care on an emergency basis subject to local ordinances. The Washington Veterinary Board of Governors administers the registration program and may suspend or revoke a facility's license for any act of noncompliance.

A qualified low-income household is a single person, family, or unrelated persons living together whose adjusted income is less than 80 percent of the median family income, adjusted for household size, for the county where the household is located.

**Summary of Bill:**

Animal care and control agencies and nonprofit humane societies registered with the Department of Health may provide veterinary care services for animals owned by qualified low-income households not limited to sterilization, vaccination, and electronic identification. Emergency care that may be provided is changed to include emergency care to any animal where prompt care is necessary to prevent death or permanent injury to the animal. Additionally, animal care and control agencies and nonprofit humane societies may provide veterinary care for sick animals up to 30 days postadoption.

The Washington Veterinary Board of Governors must establish annual reporting requirements demonstrating that animal care and control agencies and nonprofit humane societies are serving only low-income households.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Not requested.

**Effective Date:** The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony:**

(In support) Pets are important members of many families, including those families who are struggling to make ends meet or who are on fixed incomes. To these families, taking care of their pets' health is as important to them as taking care of human health. Sometimes veterinary bills can exceed \$1,000, which can be a financial hardship. There is a demonstrated unmet need that can be served. After noticing a disturbing trend, the Humane Society of Southwest Washington conducted a client survey which revealed that 65 percent of low-income clients would leave a pet's health concern untreated due to an inability to pay, and 46 percent would need to borrow money to pay for their pet's medical treatment. Currently, the law only allows certain veterinary services to be provided. This bill would expand access to veterinary services, including treatment of illnesses and broken bones, and could possibly reduce economic euthanasia, as surrendered animals who are able to be treated could be re-homed. First-time pet owners can encounter unexpected issues post adoption, so it is important that care is available for a certain time after a person adopts an

animal. This bill is similar to a bill that was introduced last year. The Veterinary Medical Association, the Humane Society, and the Washington Federation of Animal Care and Control Agencies all worked on the language in this bill and are in agreement.

(Opposed) None.

**Persons Testifying:** Senator Cleveland, prime sponsor; Stacey Graham and Jean Shaw, Humane Society for Southwest Washington; Glynis Frederiksen, City of Everett; and Greg Hanon, Washington State Veterinary Medical Association.

**Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying:** None.