



# Maryland Department of Agriculture

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## Maryland State Board of Veterinary Medical Examiners Legislative Comment

**Date:** February 15, 2017

**Committee:** Environment and Transportation

**Bill:** HB 626 Agriculture - Animal Shelters - Protocol Implementation and Enforcement

**Position:** Support as Amended.

**Explanation:** HB 626 as originally introduced would have required the Maryland Department of Agriculture (“the department”) to enforce 29 different shelter plans and protocols for animal welfare concerns. This would not only put a significant burden on the department’s resources, it also would have run the risk of allowing one practice to be acceptable in one part of the state but not another. The amended version allows the department to develop minimal standards of care that can be consistently applied to all impacted shelters.

**Comments:** The State Board of Veterinary Medical Examiners, which would be responsible for enforcing this bill, is charged with protecting public and animal health and welfare by enforcing the Veterinary Practice Act. The Board does this through (1) Effective licensure of veterinarians, veterinary technicians, and veterinary hospitals under its jurisdiction; (2) Effective discipline of veterinarians, veterinary technicians, and operators of veterinary hospitals under its jurisdiction, when warranted; and (3) Adoption of reasonable standards for the practice of veterinary medicine in the State of Maryland.

Inspecting shelters for animal welfare concerns is an expansion of our role and mission, and it is not one we accept lightly; however, we believe this bill will improve the operations of animal shelters, leading to healthier pets, and more pet adoptions – something the veterinary community obviously supports.

The 29 shelters and facilities across the state that are impacted by this bill are currently licensed by the Board, but only 16 have veterinary hospitals associated with them which the Board regularly inspects. None of them are inspected for animal welfare or shelter standards. Still, veterinary hospitals are held to a much higher standard than shelters, and we believe our inspectors will be capable of inspecting additional sites for specific standards, when required.

The overall goal of these inspections, as we have discussed with our colleagues in the animal welfare community, is to identify shelters that are having trouble maintaining minimum standards of care and helping them get the resources they need to improve their facilities and the lives of man’s best friends. Our colleagues in the animal welfare community have offered their assistance and resources toward this goal, and we will rely heavily on that cooperation going forward. Clearly, this bill will stretch our resources, but we believe it is worth doing.

**We respectfully request a favorable report on HB 626.**