



November 8, 2021

Dear Committee Chair Lilly and Rules and Competiveness Committee Members,

I am writing to express our strong opposition to HB 4912. The Humane Society of Huron Valley is an award-winning animal welfare organization and the second-largest animal shelter in Michigan, serving over 24,000 animals and the people who love them annually.

In addition to providing veterinary care to our shelter residents and sick and injured wildlife, we have a full-service outpatient veterinary clinic serving the community. We employ nine veterinarians in total, and our clinic serves thousands of pet families every year with wellness, surgery, and treatment of sickness and injury.

Of great concern in HB 4912 are the new restrictions made to telemedicine and the establishment of vet-client-patient relationship.

As you may know, Michigan, like the rest of the United States, is experiencing a veterinary crisis. We have a severe shortage of veterinarians, and access to services is costlier and more logistically challenging than ever. Dynamics related to the pandemic have made the situation worse.

Shelters and rescue groups across Michigan have extreme difficulty hiring their own vets, with critical positions going unfilled or accessing care through private vets in the community. As such, they are challenged to provide necessary and, most of all, timely treatment for homeless and abused animals. In violation of state animal cruelty laws, some animals are going untreated for sickness and pain and cannot obtain essential spay/neuter services required by law to be adopted.

This crisis is not just impacting shelters and rescues, however. It is hurting loving pet owners across the state. When services can actually be afforded, owners must make appointments for sick and injured animals weeks and sometimes months in advance. This not only leaves owners worried and frustrated, but it leaves animals in a state of suffering and sickness. The cascading impact is that more animals enter shelters because owners cannot obtain or afford the veterinary care needed.



Sadly, with more sick animals entering shelters and more shelters unable to access needed vet care, the more Michigan's companion animals will be put at risk of otherwise unnecessary euthanasia.

Telemedicine offers an excellent opportunity to expand care and affordability, and may effectively open the bottleneck and improve access for organizations and individuals alike. It also saves time for individuals with less ability to take time off work, and serves as a practical option for lower-income families and disabled individuals with transportation barriers.

Telemedicine is also an essential part of addressing restrictions related to the pandemic, allowing treatment without needing to be in close contact. In fact, a good percentage of vet clinics are still providing curbside services only – services where the establishment of the vet-client relationship is often created by phone.

In 2018, a seminal study was published that said the shortage of veterinarians and the expense of care is a national crisis and that one in four families were going without needed care. Since then, the situation has only become worse.

Most people think of their pets like family. About 67% of households in Michigan own one or more pets. Expanding telemedicine within the veterinary field has the potential to help fill a significant and troubling gap in needed services. We are in desperate need of solutions that offer greater access to veterinary care, not less.

We ask that you please oppose HB 4912. Thank you so much for your time and attention.

Sincerely,

Tanya Hilgendorf
President and CEO, Humane Society of Huron Valley