



TESTIMONY BEFORE THE PUBLIC HEALTH COMMITTEE
HB 5596 AAC TELEHEALTH
SB 1022 AAC TELEHEALTH

Good afternoon Senator Abrams, Representative Steinberg, Senator Somers Senator Hwang, Representative Petit, Senator Lesser, Representative Wood, Representative Pavalock-Damato and members of the Public Health and Insurance Committees. My name is Chris Gargamelli and I represent the Connecticut Veterinary Medical Association, the largest professional organization of veterinarians in the state. Telehealth not only affects human healthcare but affects the practice of veterinary medicine.

The purpose of statutes regulating veterinary practice, commonly referred to as the veterinary practice act, is to protect the health, safety, and welfare of both the public and animals for which we provide care. There is a glaring hole in current state statutes allowing for potential harm of the health, safety, and welfare entrusted to licensed veterinarians. There are no regulations regarding veterinary medicine and telehealth. Amending House Bill 5596 to include veterinary medicine would close that hole by defining the veterinary-client-patient-relationship (VCPR). By establishing the VCPR as the basis for veterinary care, the legislature ensures that the licensed veterinarian has adequate knowledge of his or her patient to provide proper care. That patient may be a single cat or dog or an entire herd or flock.

Connecticut is one of only a few states that does not define the VCPR. It is only the District of Columbia, Alaska, Connecticut, and Delaware that do not refer to a VCPR. As such, our citizens and their animals are at risk from outside entities trying to push the boundaries of having sufficient knowledge of the patient to provide proper care. Without a VCPR, a veterinarian who may neither be located nor licensed in Connecticut could diagnose or treat a patient in Connecticut via electronic or telephonic communication. That animal and its owner would not be protected by the regulatory powers of the Connecticut Board of Veterinary Medicine. Even if that veterinarian were a Connecticut licensed veterinarian, we question how that veterinarian could have sufficient knowledge of his or her patient.

As shown by the COVID pandemic and legislation passed by the CT General Assembly last summer, telehealth has gained increasing popularity in human medicine. However, a human medical doctor can ask his or her patient a multitude of questions to reach a diagnosis- Where does it hurt? How long have the symptoms been bothering you? How do you feel if you turn your arm to the right? How are you emotionally feeling today? In veterinary medicine, we do

not have that luxury. The hands-on physical exam is the primary tool a veterinarian uses in formulating the initial diagnostic and treatment plan. Given that our patients do not speak and often hide their illnesses and injuries from us and their owners, the physical exam is key to properly diagnosing our patients. Imagine if a rabid animal's symptoms were missed by a veterinarian diagnosing the patient over Facetime.

Amending House Bill 5596 would elevate Connecticut to the standard of care of 47 other states and well-vetted policy of the American Veterinary Medical Association. By including language regarding veterinary medicine in An Act Concerning Telehealth, you protect the health, safety, and welfare of both the public and animals in Connecticut.

Thank you. I'm happy to answer any questions.