

Good afternoon, Chairman Schaffer, Vice Chair Koehler, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Agriculture and Natural Resource Committee. My name is Dr. Laura Advent, and I currently serve as the Chief Medical Officer for Columbus Humane. Today, I am testifying on behalf of the Ohio Animal Welfare Federation in support of Senate Bill 60.

The COVID-19 pandemic required doctors and human healthcare systems to adopt new tools to ensure the delivery of high-quality care. One of the most impactful tools was telemedicine, which allowed patients to have consistent access to healthcare professionals while minimizing the risk of disease transmission. Telemedicine quickly proved its value, becoming an integral part of human healthcare. Many of you may have experienced the convenience, accessibility, and effectiveness of telemedicine firsthand. Telemedicine enables the triaging of medical concerns, reducing unnecessary emergency room visits, and allows for rapid, point-of-care response helping patients receive timely treatment for their medical concerns. Telemedicine reduces barriers to care, addressing issues like transportation concerns and financial limitations, and ultimately improving patient outcomes by increasing access to healthcare.

Given its proven benefits, telemedicine presents an invaluable opportunity to advance the field of veterinary medicine in Ohio. Today, there is a national crisis in access to veterinary care, with an estimated 50 million pets—about one-third of all pets in the U.S.—unable to access care over the past year. This lack of access threatens not only animal health but also human well-being. It is essential that the veterinary profession utilize all available tools to improve access to care and ensure that animals receive high-quality, accessible treatment.

Telemedicine would enable veterinarians to help triage emergencies, provide urgent veterinary care, prescribe behavioral medications, manage chronic diseases, among many other valuable services. This approach would also help alleviate the current shortage of veterinary professionals, improve work-life balance within the profession, and reduce the overwhelming workload many veterinarians face. By introducing telemedicine, veterinary practices could open new business avenues and work opportunities, while also potentially lowering overhead costs associated with in-person care.

Furthermore, keeping animals in their homes for treatment can have a positive impact on community and herd health by reducing the spread of infectious diseases. Most importantly, telemedicine in veterinary care would reduce barriers for pet owners across Ohio, providing critical care for more animals. Transportation barriers, for example, cannot be ignored; many Ohio residents—seniors, individuals with disabilities, those experiencing homelessness, low-income residents, and those living in rural or underserved areas—face significant challenges in reaching veterinary services.

The implementation of telemedicine does not replace the value of in-person examinations but should be viewed as a complementary tool to enhance the quality of care we provide. As technology advances, the veterinary profession must also adapt to meet the evolving needs of our communities and ensure that the quality of care remains up to date and accessible.

Introducing telemedicine in veterinary medicine would provide immediate, positive impacts for animals in Ohio, and ultimately elevate the profession to meet the standard of care offered in human medicine.

The question is not **if** telemedicine will become part of veterinary care, but **when**. Ohio is home to highly skilled and knowledgeable veterinarians who are well-equipped to use this tool safely and responsibly to provide high-quality care. It is time to empower our veterinary professionals with the same telemedicine capabilities that have transformed human healthcare, ensuring that animals in our communities receive the care they deserve.

Thank you for your consideration and for the opportunity to testify in support of Senate Bill 60.