

OHIO VETERINARY MEDICAL ASSOCIATION



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Testimony of Liesa Stone, DVM Senate Bill 182 Ohio Senate Health, Human Services and Medicaid Committee April 10, 2018

Chairman Burke, Vice Chair Beagle, Ranking Member Tavaras and members of the Senate Health, Human Services and Medicaid Committee, my name is Liesa Stone. I'm a veterinarian and the current President of the Ohio Veterinary Medical Association. On behalf of the 2,700 veterinarians and 500 veterinary student members of OVMA, thank you for this opportunity to provide interested party testimony on SB 182.

The goal of SB 182 affirms the growing strength of the human-animal bond. Animals, dogs, in particular, are increasingly considered a part of the family. Beyond the simple joy of having a dog or cat, numerous studies point to the positive human health benefits of pet ownership. As the medical professionals entrusted by society to care for and protect animals, veterinarians fully endorse spending time with animals. However, certain precautions should be considered when animals, people, and food come in contact as envisioned in SB 182.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, nearly 75% percent of new or emerging infectious diseases in people are spread from animals and 6 out of 10 known infectious diseases in people are spread from animals. Examples of zoonotic diseases – diseases transmitted from animals to humans and vice versa – range in severity from certain forms of the flu virus to Ebola. Dog specific zoonotic diseases include campylobacter, salmonella and staphylococcus infections and rabies, to name a few. Many of these diseases are easily spread through casual contact or unintentional and unknown contact with bodily fluids.

While the likelihood of a human or animal disease originating on a restaurant patio is low, it could happen. Safeguards should be in place to allow the directors of the Ohio Department of Health and the Ohio Department of Agriculture the ability to temporarily restrict the presence of dogs on dining patios during a disease outbreak. The restrictions would be temporary and allow the disease source to be identified and the disease contained. Both agencies have veterinarians on staff to specifically monitor animal and human diseases. Local health departments should also be provided similar authority.

This simple yet important modification gives those empowered to protect public health the tool they need to address a potential disease outbreak. Without it, human and animal health would be unjustly vulnerable to the myriad of known and yet to emerge disease risks. The old adage “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure” rings true in this circumstance. Preventative

medicine is a cornerstone of veterinary medicine and a responsibility my colleagues and I take very seriously. This change is not meant to prevent dogs from joining their owners at a favorite restaurant patio, it is meant to simply ensure public health is protected.

Veterinary medicine is a diverse profession that impacts not only animal health but human health as well. Large animal veterinarians guarantee a safe farm to table food supply by working with farmers and ranchers insuring the health of their herds and flocks. Veterinarians can also be found in government agencies, in the military, and in research settings. Your local health commissioner could very well be a veterinarian.

On behalf of my veterinary colleagues, thank you for your consideration. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.