

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC HEALTH

Hearing Date: March 10, 2021 8:00 AM

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COMMENTS FOR: HB 652

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Jon Weist, Legislative Officer

City of Irving

Irving, TX

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input regarding House Bill 652 relating to notice of an epizootic infectious disease occurring in an animal shelter.

HB 652 would require animal shelters to provide written, electronic or telephonic notice to each person who adopts an animal from the shelter, of any epizootic disease that occurs within the shelter population 15 days before and 15 days after the date of adoption.

The requirement that the city constantly issue notices based on the very broad term of “epizootic,” including treatable illnesses that are not a major public health concern, will instill fear in potential adopters. HB 652 harms shelters by unfairly characterizing animals from shelters as unhealthy, and therefore less desirable than pets from unregulated sources. Fearful potential adopters may turn to organizations which are not regulated by this legislation.

The City of Irving supports transparency, and we keep our adopters informed by providing a medical history report for each adopted animal. The broad notices required in HB 652 will not improve public health. It will take staff away from providing animal care to perform administrative work and it will decrease the number of animals adopted from shelters. A decrease in adoptions will ultimately lead to overcrowded shelters and an increase in euthanasia. HB 652 could reverse the progress Irving and many other cities have made in saving animals’ lives.

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Katie Jarl, Director of Government Affairs & Policy

Austin Pets Alive!

San Antonio, TX

On behalf of Austin Pets Alive!, I am submitting comments in opposition to HB 652. While we understand the heartfelt intent of this bill, the financial and staffing burden this would have on animal shelters would be significant and unmanageable. Since the start of the pandemic, local shelters have been looking for ways to reduce budgets and for private shelters fundraising has been difficult at a time when so many people have cut back on charitable giving. Therefore, increasing our budget to hire additional staff to meet these requirements would place an additional burden on staff already stretched thin with animal care responsibilities. As we read this bill, shelters would be required to reach out to every adopter, who adopted within a 30 day period, every time an animal in the shelter shows symptoms of disease. This means repeatedly contacting the same people and a huge increase to customer care staff time to accomplish it. This mandate, that comes with no additional funding for shelters, would take time away from current customer care staff working hard to increase live release rates by diverting their critical staff time away from contacting adopters, fosters and volunteers. In addition, this would disproportionately impact the most under-resourced rural shelters in our state that lack customer care staff all together. These shelters work with a very small, dedicated staff that are often overwhelmed performing multiple jobs as it is. We thank the sponsor for his interest in animal issues and would like to work with him in the future to pass legislation that supports these shelters and the incredible value they provide to our local communities.

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Shannon Sims

City of San Antonio Animal Care Services

San Antonio, TX

March 5, 2021

The Honorable Stephanie Klick

P.O Box 2910

Austin, Texas 78768

RE: HB 652 – Relating to Notice of Epizootic Infectious Disease Occurring in an Animal Shelter

Dear Chairwoman Klick,

The Animal Care Services (ACS) Department of the City of San Antonio completes the most pet adoptions of any organization in San Antonio and is one of the largest pet adoption facilities in the State. ACS impounds 31,000 pets annually and approximately 75% of these pets are placed through adoption from shelters. This bill would have a deeply negative impact on the trust the community places in shelters and the pets that ACS cares for. Adoption is key to the success of pets exiting shelters alive; therefore, ACS strongly opposes the adoption of HB 652.

The stereotypes that surround shelter pets are long held and persistent in communities around the nation. Even with decades of studies on the subject and the assistance of the National Ad Council, there are still false, though strongly held, beliefs that pets from shelters are flawed, sick, or damaged. By requiring that a shelter release to an adopter any disease present in the shelter, whether their particular pet was impacted, will force shelters to perpetuate the destructive stereotype that shelter animals are flawed, sick, or damaged.

The subjective definition of “epizootic” used by this bill, (disease occurrence is “clearly in excess of the expected frequency”), is problematic, and would require that all adopters be notified of any disease occurring at the shelter within a 30 day window of an adoption taking place. Given the nature of the pets that ACS and other shelters take in and rehabilitate, the incidence of disease within the shelter environment is continually “clearly in excess of the expected frequency” compared to the non-shelter population. There is no consideration for whether an adopted pet or adopter are at risk, meaning adopters of cats must be notified if a disease is present that only affects dogs. As a best practice, ACS currently discloses to adopters what applicable diseases the pet may have been exposed to, what to watch out for, and what resources are available for treatment, which is different from the alarmist requirements of this bill. Shelters do not have the resources to combat the damage that this legislation would create in the public eye and it will result in loss of life.

Respectfully,

Shannon W. Sims, Interim Director

Animal Care Services

City of San Antonio

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