

BILL ANALYSIS

Senate Research Center

H.B. 3439
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Water, Agriculture & Rural Affairs
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Engrossed

AUTHOR'S / SPONSOR'S STATEMENT OF INTENT

Many Texas families face significant barriers to accessing veterinary care for their pets due to the high cost of care and our state's well-documented shortage of veterinarians. Low-income Texans are hit hardest, with the fewest options and resources if their pet has an acute medical need. When owners are unable to provide veterinary care for their companion animal, pets are at the highest risk of being surrendered. Shelters across the state are overflowing with homeless pets, an epidemic exacerbated by the countless pets surrendered each year by families who love them, but who cannot access veterinary treatment. Current statute prohibits a veterinarian employed by a releasing agency from performing nonemergency veterinary services other than sterilization on an animal that the releasing agency knows or should know has an owner. However, it includes an exception for an animal whose owner is indigent.

H.B. 3439 seeks to establish a clear definition and verification of eligibility for an indigent Texan to receive nonemergency veterinary services for their pet from a veterinarian employed by a releasing agency.

H.B. 3439 amends current law relating to veterinary services performed on certain animals in the care of a releasing agency.

RULEMAKING AUTHORITY

This bill does not expressly grant any additional rulemaking authority to a state officer, institution, or agency.

SECTION BY SECTION ANALYSIS

SECTION 1. Amends Section 828.012, Health and Safety Code, by amending Subsection (b) and adding Subsection (b-1), as follows:

(b) Provides that this subsection does not prevent a veterinarian employed by a releasing agency from performing veterinary services on an animal whose owner:

(1) is an individual or family whose income is:

(A) not more than 50 percent of the median income for the area in which the individual or family lives as determined using a source or methodology accepted under federal law or rule; or

(B) less than the federal poverty level for the relevant household size; and

(2) submits to the releasing agency evidence to establish the owner qualifies as an individual or family described by Subdivision (1).

Deletes existing text providing that this subsection does not prevent a veterinarian employed by a releasing agency from performing veterinary services on an animal whose owner is indigent.

(b-1) Requires a releasing agency, if a veterinarian employed by the agency performs veterinary services on an animal whose owner qualifies as an individual or family described by Subsection (b)(1), to:

(1) maintain the evidence the owner submits to the agency under Subsection (b)(2); and

(2) on request of the State Board of Veterinary Medical Examiners (SBVME), make the evidence available to SBVME for inspection.

SECTION 2. Effective date: September 1, 2023.