

## **BILL ANALYSIS**

H.B. 3439  
By: Johnson, Ann  
Agriculture & Livestock  
Committee Report (Unamended)

### **BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE**

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 vet 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 can't 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.

### **CRIMINAL JUSTICE IMPACT**

It is the committee's opinion that this bill does not expressly create a criminal offense, increase the punishment for an existing criminal offense or category of offenses, or change the eligibility of a person for community supervision, parole, or mandatory supervision.

### **RULEMAKING AUTHORITY**

It is the committee's opinion that this bill does not expressly grant any additional rulemaking authority to a state officer, department, agency, or institution.

### **ANALYSIS**

H.B. 3439 amends the Health and Safety Code to change the animal owner qualification that allows for a veterinarian employed by a releasing agency to perform veterinary services on an animal from the owner being indigent to the owner meeting the following conditions:

- the owner is an individual or family whose income is less than the federal poverty level for the relevant household size or is not more than 80 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; and
- the owner submits to the releasing agency evidence to establish the owner qualifies as an individual or family with such income.

### **EFFECTIVE DATE**

September 1, 2023.