

Date of Hearing: March 20, 2018

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON BUSINESS AND PROFESSIONS

Evan Low, Chair

AB 2300 (Maienschein) – As Introduced February 13, 2018

**SUBJECT:** Continuing education: veterinarians.

**SUMMARY:** Authorizes veterinarians licensed by the Veterinary Medical Board (Board) to earn up to 6 hours towards the required minimum of 36 hours of continuing education by performing self-study courses or by providing pro bono spaying or neutering services to residents of low-income communities.

**EXISTING LAW:**

- 1) Establishes the Veterinary Medical Board in the Department of Consumer Affairs, whose highest priority is to protect the public in exercising licensing, regulatory, and disciplinary functions. (Business and Professions Code Section (BPC) 4800 *et seq.*)
- 2) Requires applications for a veterinary license to be furnished on a form and be accompanied by either a diploma or other verification of graduation from a veterinary college that is licensed by the board. (BPC Section 4846)
- 3) Requires each veterinarian that is licensed by the board to biennially apply for license renewal. (BPC Section 4846.4)
- 4) Requires applicants for license renewal to complete a minimum of 36 hours of continuing education in the preceding 2 years, including no more than 6 hours of self-study courses. (BPC Section 4846.5)

**THIS BILL:**

- 1) Authorizes Board-licensed veterinarians applying for license renewal to earn up to 6 hours of continuing education by performing self-study courses or by providing pro bono spaying or neutering services to residents of low-income communities.

**FISCAL EFFECT:** Unknown. This bill is keyed fiscal by the Legislative Counsel.

**COMMENTS:**

**Purpose.** This bill is sponsored by the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA). According to the author:

*Expanding veterinarian continuing education to include a voluntary option for pro bono spay and neutering services serves multiple benefits across stakeholders –*

- *For the stray, feral, and homeless animals that are euthanized every day, the policy would be a step in the right direction in reducing needless deaths.*
- *For individual households otherwise unable to afford the cost of surgery, the barriers of cost and accessibility within low-income communities could be reduced.*

- *For the broader community, we can avoid the multitude of health and safety concerns that come with free roaming, unowned animals in a community, including traffic accidents, rabies and other communicable diseases, impacts to the environment, attraction of predators, and other nuisance issues.*
- *And, last but not least, veterinarians choosing to participate in the voluntary program are provided a hands on learning opportunity. This is especially significant for those that do not routinely perform alteration surgeries. The shelter medicine and rescue community is constantly pushed to ensure that its medical procedures are among the most cost effective and cutting edge available. Veterinarians in private practice could benefit from the latest thinking in alteration procedures, while building lasting and significant good will in their communities.*

**Background.** This bill authorizes veterinarians to receive credit toward their continuing education requirements by performing pro bono spaying or neutering to residents of low-income communities in place of, or in addition, to self-study courses for a maximum of 6 combined hours.

*Continuing education requirements.* Board-licensed veterinarians must apply for the renewal of their licenses every two years. Among other requirements, the Board may issue license renewals only to those licensed veterinarians who have completed a minimum of 36 hours of continuing education. Continuing education requirements may be satisfied by attending courses relevant to veterinary medicine that are sponsored by associations such as the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA). Currently, up to 6 hours of the required continuing education may also be completed by taking self-study courses.

According to a study published by the AVMA in 2009, low-income communities, defined as households with annual incomes under \$35,000, are more likely to have pets that have not been spayed or neutered, with the high cost of the services cited as the most common reason for not altering pets. This bill purports to alleviate the financial barrier for low-income households by allowing licensed veterinarians to perform these services and earn up to 6 hours of continuing education credit while doing so.

*Other States.* Board-licensed veterinarians in the state of New Jersey may earn up to 10% of the required continuing education hours during the biennial renewal period by performing voluntary veterinary services. These services allow licensed veterinarians to perform veterinary care to eligible persons or to licensed shelters or pounds at no charge.

Board-licensed veterinarians in the state of New York may earn up to 21 ½ hours of self-instructional coursework during the triennial renewal period. Such coursework may include free spaying and neutering services to municipalities, not-for-profits, humane societies, and animal protection associations.

**Prior Related Legislation.** SB 1193 (Hill), Chapter 484, Statutes of 2016 – Extended the operation of the Veterinary Medical Board, including the amendment of existing continuing education requirements.

**ARGUMENTS IN SUPPORT:**

The **American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA)** writes: While animal shelters and animal rescue organizations often provide free or discounted surgeries, their financial and human resources for providing the service are often lean, resulting in severe limitations on availability. AB 2300 could expand access to these services exponentially by incentivizing veterinarians to donate their time and medical expertise in exchange for continuing education credit.

The **Humane Society of the United States** writes: “AB 2300 could expand access to these services exponentially by incentivizing veterinarians to donate their time and medical expertise in exchange for continuing education credit.”

**Best Friends** writes: “We support AB 2300 because it helps fulfill our goal of ending the killing of adoptable/treatable dogs and healthy cats in shelters.”

**ARGUMENTS IN OPPOSITION:**

None on file.

**POLICY ISSUE(S) FOR CONSIDERATION:**

Some veterinarians may argue that this bill does not serve the purpose of continuing education because the performing of pro bono spaying and neutering services does not provide any educational value. While there is an established need for expanding access to spaying and neutering services in low-income communities, this interest should be weighed against the possible reduction of continuing education in the veterinary profession. The author should consider alternate ways to advance the availability of pro bono work and engage with stakeholders to ensure that the intent of the continuing education requirements is upheld by any possible statutory changes.

**IMPLEMENTATION ISSUES:**

It is unclear how this pro bono work would be verified, since there would not necessarily be an established entity to certify the licensee’s hours in the same manner as an education provider does for continuing education courses. However, it should be noted that the proposed language would only allow the work to satisfy the “self-study” portion of continuing education requirements and that licensees do not currently have a mechanism for verifying the completion of that requirement by other means.

The author should work with stakeholders, especially the Board, to establish how the Board would verify completion of these requirements.

**AMENDMENTS:**

In Section (BPC Section 4846.5 (2)) strike “six” and insert “four”

**REGISTERED SUPPORT:**

American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals

Humane Society of the United States

Best Friends

**REGISTERED OPPOSITION:**

None on file.

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