
Judiciary Committee

SB 5102

Title: An act relating to veterinarian immunity from liability when reporting suspected animal cruelty.

Brief Description: Concerning veterinarian immunity from liability when reporting suspected animal cruelty.

Sponsors: Senators Pearson, Darneille, Padden, Kohl-Welles and Conway.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Provides licensed veterinarians with immunity from liability for reporting animal cruelty.

Hearing Date: 3/13/13

Staff: Omeara Harrington (786-7136).

Background:

Washington's animal cruelty statutes outlaw killing, inflicting various degrees of injury, pain, or neglect upon, or engaging in sexual practices with animals. In addition to prohibiting animal cruelty, the state's laws regarding the prevention of cruelty to animals prohibit certain specific practices and activities involving animals. Among the law's prohibitions are transporting or confining animals in an unsafe manner, engaging animals in exhibition fighting with other animals, and poisoning animals.

Veterinarians may be involved in animal cruelty investigations in a number of ways. Law enforcement may authorize a veterinarian to examine an animal in order to determine whether the animal has been neglected or abused to such a degree that removal of the animal to a suitable place for care is warranted. Veterinarians may also advise and assist law enforcement in euthanizing a seriously injured and suffering animal. Veterinarians are immune from liability for their participation in these activities, if carried out with reasonable prudence.

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

A number of states require or expressly permit licensed veterinarians to report animal cruelty, and provide immunity to veterinarians who report or testify about animal abuse or cruelty. Washington law does not require veterinarians to report abuse, and they are not given immunity for voluntarily reporting.

Summary of Bill:

Licensed veterinarians who report, in good faith and in the normal course of business, a suspected incident of animal cruelty, are immune from legal liability in an action brought against the veterinarian for reporting the suspected incident.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.