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**San Diego Humane Society and San Francisco SPCA Sponsor
Veterinary Debt Relief Bill**

State’s two largest animal welfare organizations back effort to address nationwide shortage of veterinarians

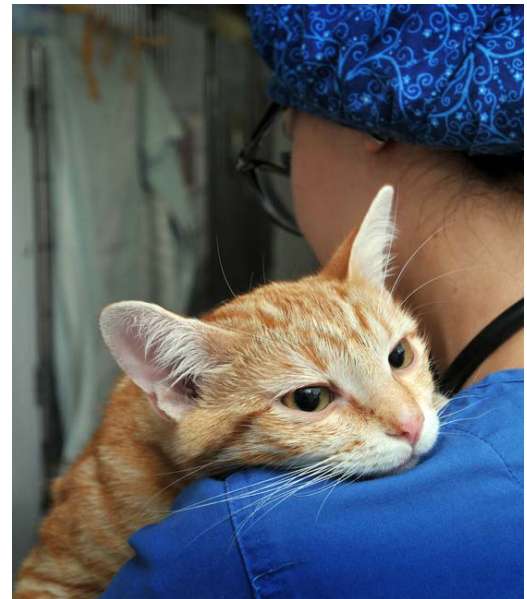
SAN DIEGO — To mitigate the crisis-level shortage of veterinarians in California that is acutely affecting access to care for the most vulnerable companion animals, Assemblywoman Cottie Petrie-Norris introduced AB 1237, the “California Public Interest Veterinary Debt Relief Act” today in Sacramento. AB 1237 is co-sponsored by San Diego Humane Society and San Francisco SPCA.

AB 1237 aims to attract existing veterinarians to practice where demand is greatest in California, by providing state and private funding to apply toward their school loans. The new state program will offer payments of up to \$150,000 in educational debt relief to licensed California veterinarians who agree to work for a California animal shelter or in underserved communities for at least five years.

With private practice veterinarians already struggling to keep up with demand — resulting in weeks-to months-long waits for appointments — the supply of reduced rate veterinary services is now nearly non-existent. California shelters caring for our state’s most vulnerable pets have been hit equally hard and struggle to provide or access veterinary care for their animals.

“The veterinary shortage is one of the most serious challenges we face today in animal welfare. We have to take action to attract more veterinarians to practice in California, especially in shelters,” said Dr. Gary Weitzman, president and CEO, San Diego Humane Society. “We also have to think about what this veterinary shortage means for vulnerable pets and their owners throughout the state.”

“With veterinary school debt averaging nearly \$200,000, it’s no wonder we have a vet shortage,” said Assemblywoman Cottie Petrie-Norris (D-Irvine). “It’s cruel to allow pets to suffer prolonged illnesses — by alleviating the stress of education debt, we can increase veterinary care access for the nearly 350,000 California shelter animals who are waiting for lifesaving treatment.”





“We know that hundreds of thousands of animals in California shelters don’t have access to adequate veterinary care,” said Dr. Jennifer Scarlett, CEO of the SF SPCA. “Inequitable access to veterinary care is the greatest threat to companion animal welfare today. This debt relief legislation would help California animals get the care they need and deserve.”

Top Three Reasons Why the California Public Interest Veterinary Debt Relief Act is Needed:

Veterinarians have the second highest monthly debt-to-income ratio among graduate degree holders. According to an American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) survey in 2020, the average veterinary school debt was \$188,853. The AVMA reports that educational debt for veterinary graduates is growing by nearly \$6000 each year. The debt load for these graduating vets makes it next to impossible for them to choose to practice in the sheltering or community service space.

A lack of access to basic care is leading to an increased length of stay for animals in shelters across the state. A recent [survey of California animal shelters](#) revealed that less than half can consistently provide treatment for non-routine illness or injury that requires a veterinarian’s assessment, and 40% of shelter respondents are unable to consistently perform lifesaving — and legally required — spay/neuter surgeries.

60% of open shelter veterinary positions remain vacant due to a lack of candidates. [Of 111 survey respondents](#), 73 have full-time veterinary positions open, and 82 have full-time registered veterinary technician positions open.

B-roll/photos of San Diego Humane Society’s veterinary staff for media use can be downloaded here: <https://bit.ly/3RPvCI0>

Suggested Tweet: Today [@AsmCottie](#) introduced [#AB1237](#) co-sponsored by [@sdhumane](#) & [@sfspca](#) to address the veterinarian shortage in California. This bill will provide educational debt relief to vets working in CA animal shelters/ underserved communities for at least 5 years. sdhumane.org/ab1237

About San Diego Humane Society

San Diego Humane Society’s scope of social responsibility goes beyond adopting animals. We offer programs that strengthen the human-animal bond, prevent cruelty and neglect, provide medical care, educate the community and serve as a safety net for all pet families. Serving San Diego County since 1880, San Diego Humane Society has campuses in El Cajon, Escondido, Oceanside, Ramona and San Diego. For more information, please visit sdhumane.org. Follow the SDHS Media Relations department on [Twitter @sdhumane](#).

About San Francisco SPCA

The San Francisco SPCA is an independent, community-supported nonprofit animal welfare organization dedicated to saving, protecting, and providing immediate care for cats and dogs who are homeless, ill, or in need of an advocate. The SF SPCA also works long-term to educate the community, reduce the number of unwanted kittens and puppies through spaying and neutering, and improve the quality of life for animals and their human companions. The organization does not receive government funding. For more information, visit sfspca.org.

About Assemblywoman Cottie Petrie-Norris

Assemblywoman Cottie Petrie-Norris represents California’s 74th District including Newport Beach, Laguna Beach, Costa Mesa, Laguna Woods and parts of Irvine and Huntington Beach. She is the Chair of the Accountability and Administrative Review Committee and a member of Banking and Finance Committee; Jobs, Economic Development, and the Economy Committee; Revenue & Taxation Committee and Veterans Committee. After working her way through Yale University, where she double majored in Economics and English, Cottie had a successful 20-year career in finance and technology. She helped to build businesses and led teams at Fortune 500 corporations, small companies and start-ups. Follow the Assemblywoman on Twitter <https://twitter.com/AsmCottie> or on Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/AssemblywomanCPN>.

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