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## **San Diego Humane Society and the ASPCA Commend California Lawmakers for Passing Bill to Expand Access to Veterinary Telehealth**

*If signed by Gov. Newsom, Assembly Bill 1399 will remove unnecessary barriers that restrict access to virtual veterinary care in the Golden State*

**SACRAMENTO** — [San Diego Humane Society](#) (SDHS) and the [ASPCA](#)® (The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals®) commend California lawmakers for passing [Assembly Bill 1399](#), to empower licensed veterinarians in the Golden State to establish a veterinarian-client-patient relationship through video technology. Introduced by Assemblymembers Laura Friedman (D-Burbank) and Josh Lowenthal (D-Long Beach), the bill passed the legislature this week with strong bipartisan and near-unanimous support. It now goes to Gov. Gavin Newsom, who has until Oct. 14, 2023, to sign the bill into law.

Given the critical shortage of veterinarians nationwide, many pet owners are experiencing firsthand a lack of access to veterinary care. In California, a number of counties have low access to veterinary care and the statewide Veterinary Care Accessibility Score is 47 out of 100, according to the [Veterinary Care Accessibility Project](#). A study from [Banfield Pet Hospital](#) estimates that 75 million pets in the U.S. could be without veterinary care by 2030 if we do not update our approach to providing care.

[Telehealth](#) is a lifeline for pet owners, especially those in remote or underserved areas with few or no veterinarians and those who face financial, or logistical obstacles getting pets to a clinic. Human healthcare has long relied on safe and convenient telehealth technology to help bridge gaps in care caused by workforce shortages, and translating this use of technology into veterinary medicine can do the same to prevent unnecessary animal suffering.

“We urge Governor Newsom to sign A.B. 1399 for its countless benefits to pet owners and shelters across the state,” said **Dr. Gary Weitzman, president and CEO, San Diego Humane Society**. “Right now, veterinarians can only give medical advice after seeing pets in person — and the wait times can be long and stressful. The situation is even more dire for shelter animals in low attention regions of California. For many shelters, the closest veterinarian is 50 or more miles away, making physical visits incredibly challenging. A.B. 1399 will modernize the practice of veterinary medicine and make telehealth a reality just as it is in human medicine.”

“When used responsibly, veterinary telehealth can reduce animal suffering, address financial and logistical barriers to veterinary care, keep pets in their homes, and extend the capacity of animal shelters to serve animals and their communities by increasing access to veterinary care,” said **Brittany Benesi, senior director of state legislation for the ASPCA’s Western division**. “Given the critical shortage of veterinarians, it’s imperative that we update our antiquated laws to embrace telehealth as a vital tool that will help provide more care to pets. We’re grateful to Assemblymembers Friedman and Lowenthal for their leadership on this bill, and we urge Governor Newsom to sign A.B. 1399 into law to enable California veterinarians to use technology to protect the pets who need it most.”

“We love our pets in California, however many pets do not regularly see a veterinarian due to significant financial, geographical and logistical obstacles. Outdated state regulations block licensed veterinarians from giving simple advice and direction to pet owners through telemedicine unless the owner first brings the pet into

the veterinary hospital,” said *Assemblymember Laura Friedman (D-Burbank)*. “A.B. 1399 modernizes the veterinarian-client-patient-relationship through telemedicine to increase access to care for all California pets.”

“The pandemic accelerated our thinking on how we access healthcare and that experience has proven that not all medicine needs to be practiced in person,” said *Assemblymember Josh Lowenthal (D-Long Beach)*. I am proud to be a joint author on A.B. 1399, which takes what we learned from the pandemic and expands telehealth access to veterinary medicine. Expanding access to telemedicine is particularly important for humans and animals who live in rural locations, lack access to transportation, or have other mobility issues. As we face a statewide shortage of veterinarians, the virtual house call is an excellent option for our pets to improve access to healthcare, when deemed appropriate by an attending veterinarian.”

The current California regulations around veterinarian telehealth are forcing pet owners to wait for hard-to-get appointments so that veterinarians can perform in-person physical examinations of an animal as a prerequisite to providing almost any medical recommendations. The law requires veterinarians to conduct a new in-person examination each time that an animal — even a regular patient of that veterinarian — has a new problem, including minor and common ailments, or for routine prescriptions. By enabling veterinarians to see new patients remotely, A.B. 1399 modernizes veterinary care in California, helping address the veterinary care crisis and ensuring that California pet and livestock owners can benefit from the safety and convenience of veterinary telehealth.

SDHS and the ASPCA encourage Californians to contact the governor’s office and urge him to sign this lifesaving bill to enhance access to veterinary care to all animals and help keep pets in loving homes.

**[B-roll/photos of San Diego Humane Society’s veterinary staff for media use can be downloaded here:](https://bit.ly/3mGrVJl)**

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**Photo/video credit: San Diego Humane Society**

#### **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](http://sdhumane.org). Follow the SDHS Media Relations department on [Twitter @sdhumane](https://twitter.com/sdhumane).

#### **About the ASPCA®**

Founded in 1866, the ASPCA® (The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals®) was the first animal welfare organization to be established in North America and today serves as the nation’s leading voice for vulnerable and victimized animals. As a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit corporation with more than two million supporters nationwide, the ASPCA is committed to preventing cruelty to dogs, cats, equines, and farm animals throughout the United States. The ASPCA assists animals in need through on-the-ground disaster and cruelty interventions, behavioral rehabilitation, animal placement, legal and legislative advocacy, and the advancement of the sheltering and veterinary community through research, training, and resources. For more information, visit [www.ASPCA.org](http://www.ASPCA.org), and follow the ASPCA on [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/ASPCA), [Twitter](https://twitter.com/ASPCA), and [Instagram](https://www.instagram.com/ASPCA).

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