

# ASSEMBLY AGRICULTURE COMMITTEE

## STATEMENT TO

### ASSEMBLY, No. 1219

with committee amendments

# STATE OF NEW JERSEY

DATED: DECEMBER 14, 2020

The Assembly Agriculture Committee reports favorably and with committee amendments Assembly Bill No. 1219.

This bill, as amended, prohibits any rabies testing from being performed on a dead domestic companion animal until the health official requiring, or the veterinarian performing, the rabies testing, and the owner of the animal have complied with the requirements set forth in the bill.

The bill, as amended, requires any health official requiring, or the veterinarian performing, rabies testing, as applicable, to notify at the first opportunity the owner of the animal, if known, verbally and in writing, of:

- (1) the necessity of the rabies testing and the reasons therefor;
- (2) the rabies testing protocol to be followed;
- (3) the protocol to be followed with regard to the handling of the animal's body;
- (4) the protocol to be followed with regard to the disposal of the animal's body or its return to the owner; and
- (5) the possibility of decapitation of the animal and, if decapitated, the possible loss of the animal's head after completion of the rabies testing.

The bill, as amended, also requires, if the owner objects to the decapitation of the animal, the health official requiring, or the veterinarian performing, the rabies testing to offer the owner the option to have only the brain removed for testing.

All notifications under the bill are required to be provided in writing and the bill, as amended, requires the animal's owner to immediately provide in writing the release, authorization, and consent required pursuant to the bill. The bill, as amended, allows for the owner to be charged a reasonable additional cost for rabies testing of only the brain.

The bill, as amended, also directs the Department of Health (DOH) to recommend, develop, and offer sensitivity training for veterinarians, veterinary technicians, veterinary assistants, and employees of animal hospitals and other facilities providing health care to domestic companion animals. The bill, as amended, requires the training to be

offered to the listed animal health care providers but specifies that the training is not mandatory. The training is required to:

- 1) provide education in the communication skills necessary to address emotional trauma, loss, and grief for the owners of domestic companion animals when the animal is sick or dying, the necessity of euthanizing the animal, and the necessary procedures associated with the care or euthanizing of the animal; and

- 2) incorporate the guidelines for addressing trauma and principles of mental health first aid developed by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration in the United States Department of Health and Human Services.

Finally, the bill provides that the requirements established in the bill do not apply to vicious dogs or impounded animals suspected of being rabid.

This bill was pre-filed for introduction in the 2020-2021 session pending technical review. As reported, the bill includes the changes required by technical review, which has been performed.

#### COMMITTEE AMENDMENTS

The committee amendments:

- 1) provide a legislative findings section concerning the reasons for and intent of the bill;

- 2) delete the provision allowing for the possibility of a decapitated head being returned to the owner;

- 3) require an owner objecting to decapitation for rabies testing purposes to choose to have only the brain removed instead;

- 4) clarify that the owner provide in writing, an agreement with the rabies testing option selected;

- 5) require the DOH to recommend sensitivity training to veterinarians and other listed animal health care providers;

- 6) require the training to provide education in the communication skills necessary to address emotional trauma, loss, and grief for the owners of sick or dying domestic companion animals;

- 7) require the training to incorporate certain guidelines and principles for addressing trauma developed by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration in the United States Department of Health and Human Services;

- 8) require the training to be offered to, but not mandatory for, veterinarians and other listed animal health care providers; and

- 9) make technical and clarifying corrections to the bill.