

SB 410: TEMPORARY LICENSURE FOR VETERINARY SHELTER MEDICINE AND PET STERILIZATION SERVICES

FACT SHEET

The Problem:

- Georgia's ongoing shortage of veterinary professionals in shelter medicine has severely impacted access to low cost spay/neuter services, resulting in long wait lists for appointments and high shelter intakes of dogs and cats (~85% of animals unaltered upon impound).
- Twenty-eight (28) Georgia counties have **zero** veterinary professionals, and most counties are below the national average for access to basic veterinary care.
- The demand for low-cost sterilization services in Georgia is high, but most clinics are operating below capacity due to a shortage of surgeons. A 2022 sample survey of nonprofit spay/neuter programs in Georgia showed that nearly half had **wait times of over 2 months**. Often during the waiting period, animals get pregnant and perpetuate the problem. Further, adopted animals sometimes leave the shelter unaltered and new owners are unable to get a timely appointment. The sterilization of shelter animals prior to sexual maturity is recommended by the Association of Shelter Veterinarians.
- Sterilization of pets is the **single most important strategy** in managing excess dogs and cats in our state, including shelter animals prior to adoption.
- The cost of unintended litters falls on government and nonprofit shelters when litters are surrendered or abandoned.
- The Covid-19 pandemic lockdown in 2020 also contributed to a significant backlog of elective spay/neuter surgeries in the South and triggered a surge in pet overpopulation from which Georgia has not yet recovered. The current shortage of veterinary professionals in shelter medicine has dramatically slowed this recovery.

The Legislative Proposal:

This legislation would permit veterinarians and veterinary technicians who hold active licenses in other states to obtain a 6-month temporary license or license by endorsement, for the purpose of remedying staffing shortages in shelter medicine and nonprofit spay/neuter clinics across Georgia. The proposed bill is analogous to the existing temporary license for military veterans and spouses transitioning to private practice in Georgia (O.C.G.A. 43-1-34).

The Benefits to Veterinarians, Georgians, and Pets:

- Temporary licensing provides an expedited pathway to **expand spay/neuter capacity in underserved areas** of Georgia but maintains the compelling reasons for professional veterinary licenses – public safety and consumer protection.
- Georgia must compete for veterinary professionals in a tight job market; temporary licensing **lessens employment delays** caused by bureaucratic requirements for an in-state license (e.g., Georgia law exam) and will be especially helpful for recruiting veterinary professionals for relief work in areas near our state borders.
- A growing number of veterinarians are pursuing relief work due to flexibility of the work schedule and diversity of experiences. Temporary licensing offers an excellent avenue for getting started. The number of **relief veterinarians increased 30%** from 2008 to 2018 and this trajectory is expected to continue.
- A large review published in the Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association (White, et.al., 2018) concluded that nonprofit sterilization programs were predominantly used by (1) low-income clients who would not have otherwise sterilized their pets and (2) government shelters and nonprofit rescues providing care for unowned animals. Studies have repeatedly shown that **financial and transportation barriers are the top reasons** pet owners do not seek veterinary care including sterilization (Kogan et.al, 2021.; Felsted & Weinstein, 2020).
- While SB 410 is a resourceful way to provide immediate solutions to staffing shortages in shelter medicine, it is only one of multiple solutions needed to fully address Georgia's pet overpopulation crisis.