

DEC 10 2010

MEMO



Senate of Pennsylvania

December 9, 2010

TO: ALL SENATORS

FROM: Stewart J. Greenleaf

Stewart

SUBJECT: Cosponsorship – Exemption from Rabies Vaccination

I am reintroducing **Senate Bill 1454**, amending the Rabies Prevention and Control in Domestic Animals and Wildlife Act to provide an exemption from rabies vaccination for dogs and cats with existing medical conditions.

A constituent recently learned from a friend in New Jersey who owns a dog with serious health issues that a veterinarian may, upon examination, grant an exemption from the rabies vaccination if it is determined that it would be medically contraindicated to vaccinate the dog due to infirmity, other physical condition, or regimen of therapy. When my constituent looked into obtaining a similar exemption in Pennsylvania for her dog, which has the same medical conditions, she discovered that the above act does not allow for such an exception.

Under current law, every person living in this Commonwealth, owning or keeping a dog or cat over three months of age, must have them vaccinated against rabies by a licensed veterinarian or under the supervision of a licensed veterinarian. Upon vaccination the owner of the dog or cat will receive a certificate and tag. A person who violates any provision of the act (i.e. fails to vaccinate their dog or cat) commits a summary offense and shall, upon conviction, be sentenced to pay a fine up to \$300. While the Agriculture Department's Bureau of Animal Health and Diagnostic Services has informally advised veterinarians that express concern with vaccinating animals with compromised health to document the medical reasons for not vaccinating and to provide a copy to the owner in the event of an investigation/inspection, it does not protect the owner of the animal from being cited.

My legislation would grant an exemption from vaccination against rabies if a licensed veterinarian examines and determines that it would be medically contraindicated to vaccinate a dog or cat due to an infirmity, other physical condition, or regimen of therapy. The department shall develop an exemption form which must be completed and signed by the veterinarian and animal owner. A rabies vaccination exemption shall be valid for a period of up to one year after which the animal must be re-examined. At that time the animal must either be vaccinated against rabies or, if exemption status still applies, a new certificate of exemption must be issued. The veterinarian shall maintain the signed exemption as part of the animal's medical records and must provide a copy to the owner.

Administering a rabies vaccine to an animal with existing medical conditions could seriously jeopardize their health. In addition, shots administered to an unhealthy animal may not provide immunity. Manufacturers of rabies vaccine state that it is for *healthy* animals and the United States Department of Agriculture agrees. A precaution listed by one rabies vaccine manufacturer is "A protective immune response may not be elicited if animals are incubating an infectious disease, are malnourished or parasitized, are stressed due to shipment or environmental conditions, are otherwise immunocompromised ..." If a veterinarian has determined that a vaccination would be injurious to the animal's health, the owner should not be forced to risk their pet's life. With passage of this legislation Pennsylvania would join thirteen other states (i.e., New York, New Jersey, Massachusetts, Connecticut, New Hampshire and Virginia) that provide medical exemptions from rabies vaccination.

If you would like to cosponsor this legislation, please contact Pat Snively of my office by e-mailing her at psnively@pasen.gov.