



Colorado Veterinary
Medical Association

HB15-1187 Concerning Mental Health Evaluations of Licensed Veterinarians Conducted by a Veterinarian Peer Health Assistance Program as Ordered by the State Board of Veterinary Medicine

House: Representative Steve Lebsock

Senate: Senator Leroy Garcia and Senator Jerry Sonnenberg

House Committee: Agriculture, Livestock and Natural Resources

Summary: This bill would insert into the veterinary Practice Act provisions very similar to those in the Medical and Dental Practice Acts to elevate the mental and physical competence of the veterinarian to allow for continued practice under supervision by the Veterinarian Peer Assistance Program. Without this bill, it could become necessary for the Board to immediately suspend the license of the practicing veterinarian. This would be a hardship to both the practitioner, as well as his or her clients and the service-seeking public. Under this proposed bill, if the veterinarian does not agree to be evaluated then appropriate disciplinary action can ensue. Both the medical and dental professions have seen positive results from this program.

The Issue: Veterinarians, like their counterparts in the medical and dental professions, sometimes find themselves in situations where they are unable to practice their profession with reasonable skill and safety due to mental illness or excessive use of alcohol or habit-forming drugs. When this condition comes to the attention of the State Board of Veterinary Medicine, it is incumbent upon the Board to protect the public by quickly evaluating the competence of the veterinarian to continue his or her practice.

Why This Legislation is needed: Like medical doctors and dentists, veterinarians have easy access to medications that are habit-forming. Furthermore, the stresses of the job, such as euthanizing animals, consoling distraught clients who have just lost a pet, and mandatory reporting of animal abuse against their clients are just a few of the very emotionally demanding parts of their job. Veterinarians deserve the opportunity to address any substance abuse issues or mental health issues before losing their license to practice. This bill will allow for a confidential evaluation, followed by a detailed work plan under the supervision of the Veterinary Peer Assistance Program to give the veterinarian the opportunity to best resolve the issue safely for the veterinarian, the service-seeking public and the animal clients. This program has been highly successful in both the dental and medical professions.