

H.355 – An Act Relative to Animal Telehealth



Massachusetts Veterinary Medical Association

The MVMA opposes H.355 to protect veterinary standards, consumer safety, and animal wellbeing

WHAT WOULD H.355 DO?

H.355 seeks to **eliminate the requirement of an in-person** examination to establish a Veterinary-Client-Patient Relationship (VCPR), allowing the relationship to be **initiated virtually through telemedicine**.

This means veterinarians could diagnose and prescribe medication such as antibiotics, **without ever physically examining the animal**.

WHY DOES AN IN-PERSON VCPR MATTER?

A **Veterinary-Client-Patient Relationship (VCPR)** is the foundation of effective veterinary care. It is:

- Established through at least one annual, in-person exam or medical visit.
- Required under both state and federal law for diagnosis and the prescription of many drugs.
- Vital to ensure veterinarians understand the animal's condition, history, and environment, which **cannot be accurately or safely done via a screen** with animals.

WHY THIS BILL IS PROBLEMATIC:

1. A Harm to Animal Health

Without a hands-on examination, there's a greater **risk of misdiagnosis**, inappropriate prescribing or **overprescribing** of medication, and potential **delays** in critical care.

2. A Threat to Consumer Protection

Veterinarians often prescribe medications "off-label," meaning in ways not explicitly listed on the drug's label. Current **federal law only allows** this prescribing with an **in-person VCPR**. This bill would mislead consumers and enable telehealth platforms to charge for virtual visits only for a client to be redirected to in-person clinics for treatment, resulting in **duplicated costs, delays in care, and confusion** about what services are actually permitted.

WHAT IS ALLOWED RIGHT NOW?

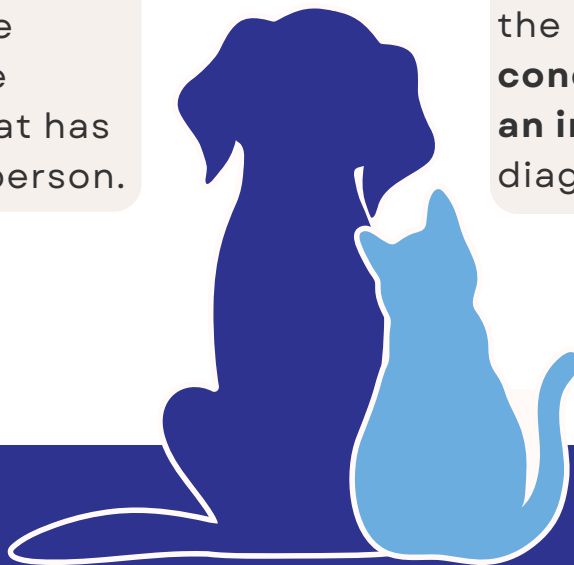
Veterinarians in Massachusetts already use telehealth safely and effectively within existing law:

- ✓ **Teletriage:** determines urgency of in-person care (no diagnosis or prescription). No in-person VCPR necessary.
- ✓ **Teleadvice:** offers general info or follow-up recommendations. No in-person VCPR necessary.
- ✓ **Telemedicine:** diagnosis and treatment of patients conducted virtually that is permitted after an in-person VCPR is established once a year.

The Model Veterinary Practice Act, as defined by the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA), affirms that telemedicine must be conducted within the context of a VCPR that has been established in person.



Proponents of this bill claim virtual VCPR will help expand access to care. In reality, animals that aren't getting regular preventive care are the ones most **likely to have conditions that will require an in-person exam** to diagnose and treat.



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The MVMA represents over 1,800 veterinarians and students statewide. Please protect animal health, uphold science-based medicine, and support ethical veterinary standards by opposing H.355.