



Senate Bill 5004 – Questions & Answers About the Legislation and Its Impact

What is SB 5004?

SSB 5004 amends the language of RCW 18.92.250, and allows animal care/control agencies and nonprofit humane societies (shelters) to legally provide veterinary care to owned animals in specific circumstances. Previously, public veterinary services by shelter veterinarians was limited to spay/neuter, microchips, and vaccinations – and only to low-income households. SB 5004 becomes law on July 28, 2019.

What are the primary changes?

- Allows veterinarians and veterinary technicians employed by shelters to provide all types of veterinary services to pets of low-income households.
- Allows shelters to offer veterinary care to adopted pets for up to 30 days after adoption – regardless of household income.
- Allows shelters to provide treatment in the case of an emergency, regardless of household income – “where there is an unexpected, serious occurrence or situation that urgently requires prompt action in order to prevent an animal’s death or permanent injury”.

Who is impacted by this law?

- Animal care and control agencies (as defined in RCW 16.52.011), and non-profit humane societies, registered as a 501(c)(3)
- Veterinarians, Veterinary Technicians, and Veterinary Medication Clerks employed by these agencies

What is a “low-income household”?

The bill uses the definition outlined in RCW 43.185A.010: *“a single person, family or unrelated persons living together whose adjusted income is less than eighty percent of the median family income, adjusted for household size, for the county where the project is located”*.

Median family income charts can be found here:

<https://www.huduser.gov/portal/datasets/il.html>

Who will ensure compliance with the new law?

Shelters that intend to offer any type of public veterinary services must first register with the Department of Health, and are subject to the same legal requirements as any veterinary professional. All laws pertaining to veterinary medical facilities and practice standards must also be followed.

The Board of Veterinary Governors are authorized to establish “annual reporting requirements”, to ensure that shelters are serving only low-income households. The Board has indicated a willingness to work with shelters to develop a format that will not be overly burdensome. We expect that this will become a discussion point within the next year.

What else?

The Federation has enjoyed a long-standing positive relationship with the WSVMA, and they have been instrumental in supporting the passage of this bill. As we worked on the language of SB 5004, some private practice veterinarians expressed concern about the bill’s impact on their individual businesses.

The WSVMA has asked that – when speaking about new programs or services – we take care to not disparage veterinarians in our community who utilize a higher pricing model. The reality is that shelters are only able to offer discounted services because our efforts will be subsidized by donors.

Whenever possible, we suggest avoiding the use of the phrase “low-cost veterinary care”, and instead, use the term “donor-subsidized veterinary care” (or something similar). We feel that this distinction will help promote positive relationships with our local community veterinarians.

Further questions?

WA Federation of Animal Care & Control Agencies

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Humane Society for Southwest Washington

www.southwesthumane.org

Washington State Department of Health

<https://www.doh.wa.gov/LicensesPermitsandCertificates/ProfessionsNewReneworUpdate/Veterinarian>