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February 11, 2021

To: House Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources
Re: Support for HB 2733

Dear Chair Witt and Members of the House Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources,

Oregon statute requires any county that licenses dogs to have proof of rabies vaccination before issuing that license. **Multnomah County supports HB 2733 which allows the option for counties to provide a grace period to provide such proof.** This bill will not 'decouple' the rabies vaccination requirement from pet licensing, and any pet license that does not have proof of vaccination within 60 days will be revoked and cited. This same bill in the last session, HB 4053, passed **unanimously** out of both this committee, House Ag and Natural Resources and the House Rules Committee.

As I mentioned, Oregon statute requires any county that licenses dogs to have proof of rabies vaccination before issuing that license. In 2018, Multnomah County Animal Services conducted an internal audit and found itself out of compliance. Immediately after coming into compliance with this law, we experienced a 35% drop in dog license rates over the course of 3 months. Because we have an online licensing system, we were able to clearly see those licenses which were abandoned at the point where uploading proof of rabies vaccination was required. We have heard that people abandon licensing at this point because they don't always have the proof of rabies vaccine on hand and have to either find it, or contact their veterinarian's office, often after regular business hours.

The reduction in licensure is problematic, since we are unable to monitor or enforce the rabies vaccine requirement for unlicensed animals. The proposed bill, HB 2733, allows counties to issue a license, and then allows a sixty (60) day grace period for proof of rabies vaccination to be provided. These new terms will allow licensing agencies to track unvaccinated animals and still enforce the rabies vaccination requirement, while also removing barriers to pet owners who need to license their dog. Then, the owner can either provide proof of vaccination directly to our agency, or local veterinarians can submit the information about animals they vaccinate per an existing Multnomah County ordinance. Per our County ordinance, we require every veterinarian vaccinating a dog or cat in the County to provide information on those vaccines to us. Multnomah County is committed to protecting public health against rabies, which is evidenced by requiring not only dogs, but also cats to be inoculated against rabies. That requirement will not change with the passage of this bill.

The issue of rabies compliance has been further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, as most veterinary and vaccination clinics throughout the state have been impacted and reduced service hours. This means that owners are often delayed in obtaining a rabies inoculation for their dog due to

veterinary availability. As a result, many pets are left unlicensed as they cannot immediately meet the state requirements for inoculation prior to licensing.

For Oregon counties who prefer the rabies vaccination policy as it is now, HB 2733 allows them to keep their current licensing process and rabies reporting requirements without any modifications, and they will not be impacted. For counties who want to allow the 60 day grace period, HB 2733 provides that as a possibility, one which we know will both increase rabies inoculation and licensing compliance in our respective jurisdictions.

Multnomah County is invested in ensuring that all dogs and cats in the county are inoculated. The more dogs we can bring into the licensing fold, the more oversight we can provide. We are supportive of this bill, because it will allow us to amend our County code to be more flexible and ensure that rabies vaccines are tied to our licensing records -- without creating additional barriers to the pet owner. We have improved our system of tracking this data, where our staff now enter the data from the veterinarian's offices into our systems and match the records in a timely manner. Multnomah County also partners with vaccination clinics and other programs to support low-income and free rabies vaccinations for pets.

Please note that the Association of Oregon Counties (AOC) is also supportive of this bill, because it provides for county flexibility while maintaining emphasis on public health.

Thank you for your consideration of HB 2733 in the interest of public health, its positive impact for dog owners, and dog licensing agencies.

Respectfully,



Wade Sadler

Director

Multnomah County Animal Services

Department of Community Services