



The Advocacy Voice of New York's Humane Societies, SPCAs, nonprofit and municipal animal shelters.

## **MEMO IN OPPOSITION TO GOVERNOR'S BUDGET PROPOSAL TO COMPEL VETERINARIANS TO E-PRESCRIBE (S.2507/A.3007, Part N)**

The proposal to compel veterinarians to e-prescribe, per the Governor's budget proposal, would have significant negative impacts on the state's network of animal shelters.

### **Shelter Infrastructure**

While most shelters use electronic records to track animals and their outcomes, these programs do not have e-prescription modules nor do the manufacturers have plans to make that happen soon. There are some smaller shelters that do not use electronic records and manage the intake and adoption process by hand. E-prescribing will not work for shelters and their veterinarians the way it does for traditional medical doctors who serve human patients.

Shelters in rural settings are faced with the same broadband access problems as the people who live in rural New York—intermittent, spotty and, at times, non-existent. Cell service is also extremely problematic in rural communities. This lack of coverage will make it difficult for e-prescribing and for getting the medications companion animal need in a timely manner.

### **Veterinary Software**

This type of software is not designed for e-prescriptions. Implementing this change at shelters would be an unfunded mandate for shelters and their veterinarians. One shelter estimated e-prescription software and computer upgrades would cost thousands of dollars per year.

Shelter professionals are also concerned that this mandate would increase wait time for medications which, in turn, would endanger animals.

### **Consumer Choice**

Unlike purchasing prescriptions for human patients from local pharmacies or mail order pharmacies such as CareMark, prescription fulfillment for companion animals is limited to compounding pharmacies, local pharmacies, and online services such as PetMeds and Chewy. E-prescribing will limit the ability of companion animal owners to shop around for the best prices, especially in low-income communities and areas without broadband access. With a prescription in hand, consumers can research different online options and get the best pricing for drugs for their companion animals. Consumers cannot purchase these medications using their regular

health insurance plans-it is all out of pocket unless an owner has pet insurance, a financial burden in itself for low-income individuals. We do not want to limit consumer choice or the ability of owners to save money.

This is also a social justice issue—we all know that computer and/or broadband access is limited in communities of color, poor communities and rural New York. Yet, these folks do have companion animals that they love and care for. Why put an additional burden of having their prescriptions transmitted electronically to a pharmacy that may be more expensive and/or further than the than the one they presently use? This simply hampers their ability to shop around for the best price.

### **Rural Services**

Organizations such as Shelter Outreach Services out of Ithaca, NY, that serve multiple counties and multiple shelters that cannot afford their own veterinarian on staff, are on the road when they are seeing patients. They are working out of their cars in mostly rural settings where broadband as well as cell access is limited. Again, going back to the same concern rural shelters face.

For some shelters, it is simply easier and faster to call in an animal prescription to a local pharmacy who can dispense the medications. Many shelters are short staffed—especially now because of the pandemic and the inability of shelter workers to get vaccines despite shelters being considered essential services. These shelters prefer submitting a prescription either over the phone or in-person so that the vagaries of rural internet access do not hinder companion animals getting the medications they need.

**It is for these reasons that the New York State Animal Protection Federation opposes the Governor's budget proposal (S.2507/A.3007, Part N) to mandate e-prescriptions for veterinarians.**