



March 9, 2020

Representative Mike Freiberg
Chair, MN House Government Operations
State Office Building / 100 Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
St. Paul, Minnesota 55155

RE: Animal Folks support for HF 3584, the Companion Animal Board bill

Chair Representative Freiberg:

On behalf of our board members, supporters, and volunteers throughout Minnesota, we strongly support House File 3584, authored by Representative John Lesch, and respectfully request your support of this bill. Thank you for giving this board a hearing.

Animal Folks is actively involved with animal welfare and protection issues throughout Minnesota. Our particular focus is with system reform — providing research, education, training, and state and local legislative efforts to reform systems, where needed, to improve the effectiveness of animal welfare and protection issues.

The need for a Companion Animal Board (CAB)

Over the years, we have seen the role of companion animals, which includes pets, change significantly in the lives of Minnesotans. Companion animals are now part of the family. More Minnesota families have a dog or cat than children. And the pet industry has grown to over \$75 billion.

The need for the Companion Animal Board is critically important and long-overdue. The industry is growing and issues that will face the state will only get bigger and greater.

The problem

One key problem we have witnessed is the lack of any state agency or board within the State of Minnesota to provide specific expertise and oversight of companion animal issues.

When bills get introduced at the MN Legislature pertaining to companion animal issues or when topics are raised that may impact companion animals, pet owners, organizations, or communities, there is no place to “house” these bills or topics. Current state government is structured around livestock production (Department of Agriculture) or wildlife (Department of Natural Resources).

Some companion animal issues have been directed to the MN Board of Animal Health (BAH); however, the core mission of the BAH is animal disease control, with a focus on agriculture due to the food supply.

While all animals require proper care and treatment, companion animals are not agricultural products to be eaten or worn. Companion animals are about companionship, and that companionship requires different skills and expertise.

This bill is about expertise

This board will provide specific expertise related to companion animal health, welfare, and well-being — and will work with organizations and communities throughout Minnesota that care for these animals.

The proposed Companion Animal Board is a common sense approach that addresses the growing needs of this field, which includes the collaboration between the public, private, and nonprofit sectors.

We have talked with numerous people and organizations in Minnesota about the need for this board, including humane societies and animal shelters, small animal veterinarians, disaster and relief services, military veterans, human health services, pet owners, and others. Support for this bill is significant.

The need to establish this board is imperative. Thank you for your consideration of HF 3584.

Best regards,

Ann Olson
Founder and Executive Director
On behalf of Animal Folks
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