



February 2022

Representative Mike Nelson

Members of the House State Government Finance and Elections Committee

State Office Building / 100 Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd

St. Paul, Minnesota 55155

RE: Animal Folks support for HF 208, the Companion Animal Board bill

Chair Nelson and House State Government Finance and Elections Committee members,

On behalf of our board members, supporters, and volunteers throughout Minnesota, we strongly support House File 208, authored by Representative Freiberg, and respectfully request your support of this bill.

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

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 be an estimated \$275 billion by 2030.

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 board within the State of Minnesota to provide focus, expertise, and oversight of companion animals and those who care for these animals.

When bills pertaining to companion animals get introduced at the Minnesota Legislature or when topics are raised that impact pet owners, organizations, or local governments, there is no place to “house” these bills or topics in state government. Current state government is structured around livestock production (Department of Agriculture), wildlife management (Department of Natural Resources) and dangerous animal disease (Board of Animal Health).

Some companion animal issues have been directed to the MN Board of Health (BAH); however, the core mission of the BAH is dangerous animal disease with a focus on agriculture due to the food supply. (Four of the six BAH board members are livestock producers.)

While all animals require proper care and treatment, companion animals are not agricultural products to be eaten or worn and should not be led or guided by livestock production and agricultural interests. Companion animals are about companionship, and that companionship with people requires different skills and expertise.

Statewide leadership, focus, and expertise

The Companion Animal Board will be 100% dedicated to companion animal health, welfare, and well-being — and will work with organizations and communities throughout Minnesota who 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 public, private, and nonprofit sectors.

Animal Folks has interviewed multiple individuals and organizations, including animal shelters, social workers, mental health professionals, veterinarians, animal rescue organizations, city and county managers, emergency and disaster relief services, animal welfare groups who work with the elderly and low-income families, and pet owners — all of whom have multiple stories to tell about why the Companion Animal Board is needed to provide leadership statewide and to assist their needs and that of pet owners.

The time is now

Establishment of the Companion Animal Board is critical. The pandemic has shown even more why this board, specifically dedicated to companion animals and the animal-human bond, is vitally needed.

Thank you for your consideration and support of HF 208.

Sincerely,

Ann Olson
Founder and Executive Director, Animal Folks
651-222-2821 / ann@animalfolks.org
1041 Grand Avenue #115, St. Paul, MN 55105