

Companion Animal Licensing Procedures Work Group Meeting Minutes

Meeting date and time: 10a-2p, 4/25/2016

Meeting place: Perimeter Center
9960 Mayland Drive
Henrico, Virginia 23233
Board Room #3

Attendees: Jaime Hawley, Piedmont Health District, Virginia Department of Health
Carolynn Bissett, Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services
Jodi Collins, Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services
Lindsay Reames, Virginia Farm Bureau
Benny David, Virginia Alliance for Animal Shelters
Paulette Dean, Danville Area Humane Association
Scott Miller, Hanover County Treasurer, County Treasurer's Association
David Pierce, Data Management Services, Department of Motor Vehicles
Alice Harrington, Virginia Federation of Dog Clubs and Breeders
Robin Starr, Richmond SPCA
Matthew Gray, The Humane Society of the United States
Debra Griggs, Virginia Federation of Humane Societies
Patricia Duttry, Three Rivers Health Department, Virginia Department of Health
Heidi Meinzer, Virginia Federation of Humane Societies
William Tydings, Virginia Animal Control Association
Rob Leinberger, Richmond Animal Care and Control, Virginia Animal Control Association
Debbie Condrey, Chief Information Officer, Virginia Department of Health
Larry Land, Virginia Association of Counties
Margaret Rucker, President, Virginia Veterinary Medical Association
Terry Taylor, Immediate Past President, Virginia Veterinary Medical Association
Julia Murphy, Virginia Department of Health
Leslie Knachel, Virginia Board of Veterinary Medicine

After all participating parties introduced themselves, Julia Murphy reviewed the main directives contained in HJ160 which are that the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) "shall review Virginia's companion animal licensing procedures and assess the feasibility of establishing a statewide system for recording rabies vaccinations and licensing that may include a statewide database of licensed companion animals that can be remotely accessed by animal control officers in the field." In addition, Dr. Murphy reviewed the timeline associated with this study, sharing that the Virginia Department of Health Commissioner is to have a final draft of this work group's report by October 15, 2016. Dr. Murphy thought then that a reasonable timeline for a first draft to be presented to the work group for review and comment was September 15, 2016 to allow time for further discussion if necessary and incorporating and comments from

work group members prior to the October 15, 2016 VDH Commissioner deadline. All future meetings were then scheduled and will be held on the following dates: May 24, June 14, July 18, August 15 and September 9. All meetings will be scheduled from 10a-2p. Meeting places will be announced as soon as possible. It was also discussed that the number of meetings necessary and the length of the meetings may change depending on the progress made with the study.

At that point, Dr. Murphy asked Mr. Miller of the County Treasurer's Association (CTA) to review the history of the CTA's involvement with the issue of studying companion animal licensing procedures and the thoughts of the CTA in regard to how to proceed with this study within the context of the resolution language. Mr. Miller offered an overview of licensing as it is now done in Hanover County. His description of licensing in Hanover county and his overarching thoughts about this study included the following information and concepts:

- veterinarians send copies of rabies vaccinations associated with dogs they vaccinate to their local treasurers and treasurers sell licenses,
- treasurers then wait 60 days before making attempts to contact owners who have not presented to the treasurer's office to purchase a license,
- there is redundancy in the system associated with licensing in that treasurers need to rekey information veterinarians may have already keyed in to their computer systems associated with rabies certificates,
- the process of vaccinating for rabies and licensing is a two-step process that could be made more efficient by making it a one-step process,
- goal is for animal to be vaccinated for rabies and to be traceable,
- traceability allows for fewer number of days that lost animals would need to be kept in a shelter,
- let the vaccination performed by a veterinarian also serve as the license/have the veterinarian license the dog,
- Local governments do not generate much funding via companion animal licensing
- Hanover county typically grosses \$80,000 from licensing of which \$20,000 is net profit after expenses
- His county administrator does not think this net profit is worth the effort financially for almost 10,000 transactions
- Society understands rabies and they are complying at a very high rate which makes life easier on local government and citizens
- In Hanover county, some veterinarians also sell licenses when they vaccinate dogs
- Hanover county issues 3 year rabies tags which decreases the need for yearly administrative processes associated with a certain percentage of dogs, whereas some localities issue tags that must be renewed yearly
- Hanover county uses Laserfische, a document management system that, with the aid of a bar code, has allowed the treasurer in a test environment to successfully process rabies vaccination information much faster than manual keying of that information
- Privacy issues should be acknowledged with a database; not interested in creating a data file that can be FOIAed; main desire is a way to have animals identified

- His goal is to streamline the process in regards to number of visits an owner/citizen needs to make and capture the data so ACOS can have access to that in a shorter time.

Some of these concepts and information can also be found in a document entitled “Virginia Dog License” that Mr. Miller submitted for the group’s consideration in advance of the meeting (See Appendix A). In addition, to offer the group a perspective in regard to dog license fees, he submitted a document detailing dog license fees for 83 Virginia localities (See Appendix B)

Mr. Miller reviewed a sample of eight counties and one city treasurer (see Appendix C) that he used to assess the percentage of dog owners in compliance with licensing laws as compared to those in compliance with rabies vaccination laws. In those localities, as compared the number of rabies certificates the locality received associated with dogs that had been vaccinated, these localities reported a range of 28%-85% compliance with owners presenting themselves to the local treasurer’s office to purchase a license with an average of 57% compliance. So, in this assessment, as compared to compliance with licensing, compliance with rabies vaccinations is higher.

Discussion about the concept of animal licensing as well as animal identification as it relates to a statewide database that might be developed that could be accessed by animal control officers in the field. Thoughts and discussion included:

- Ms. Griggs inquired about the Laserfische program and if the documents were captured in the database as a pdf.
- Mr. Miller responded that an image of the rabies certificates was captured.
- Mr. David offered that tags are an older form of identification and that microchips would really be the best method of capturing animal identification. Perhaps if Virginia wanted to purchase a high number of microchips, the price of each would be cost effective.
- Dr. Rucker shared that while microchipping is a good method of identification it is important to keep in mind that each time a vaccination is given, that information needs to be updated in the patient’s record. Dr. Rucker registers animals at her clinic when she places a microchip and then, if the client wants, she registers the microchip in the client’s name as well. Dr. Rucker sees licensing as associated with three major issues: rabies, animal identification, and income. How do we manage the income aspect? It seems as if from a rabies awareness standpoint we’re doing well. We need to decide why we are here in terms of the study. Is it mostly about animal identification? Dr. Rucker also stated that “you only get rabies but once!”
- Mr. Miller commented that since Virginia requires that all localities license dogs and only a few require licensing cats, that the group should concentrate on the process as it applies to dogs and then, at some point in the future, see how it may apply to cats.
- Mr. David remarked that microchipping and better animal identification could help save shelter space and expense.

- Ms. Dean asked the group to consider that if we focus too much on microchipping we might have some animals falling through the cracks in regard to animal identification; a tag is much more visible, outward sign of animal identification and the average citizen may not be able to afford microchipping.
- Mr. Land commented that licensing is a local government revenue resource and these funds should be used to support animal control.
- Mr. Tydings offered that microchipping at the point of rabies vaccination would be challenging as part of a rabies clinic which, in his area, are typically conducted in a facility that is not otherwise used for the practice of veterinary medicine without an exemption for microchipping like there is for rabies vaccinations provided the county government approves the clinics.
- Ms. Knachel reviewed the procedure for rabies clinics and the Board of Veterinary Medicine's policy on microchipping and stated that would need to be changed if microchipping was going to be offered at rabies clinics not held in a facility licensed to practice veterinary medicine.
- Dr. Rucker commented that she hopes this group might be able to consider making adjustments to code and fees. She stated that a veterinarian must have a mobile license to microchip; rabies can be done differently and done outside a licensed facility but local government permission must be given; no language in the code to offer clinical services any other way, such as microchipping, unless you have a mobile license.
- Mr. David commented that the state of Pennsylvania is doing something already with microchipping/licensing requirement and he will bring more information on that to the next meeting.
- Ms. Meinzer stressed the need for discussions with someone who could answer questions about changing the information contained in a microchip if an animal is transferred to a new owner and stressed that animal control having access to more microchip scanners would be beneficial.
- Dr. Taylor mentioned that changing information on a microchip can be done and this has been done in livestock. There is a transfer fee.
- Mr. Leinberger stated that he thought the \$10 cap associated with licensing fees should be lifted so that localities could charge more with the further thought that if licenses cost more, there would be more incentive from a local revenue standpoint for animal control officers to proactively collect those fees.
- Susan Seward, VVMA lobbyist and member of the audience, stated she agreed with raising fees or perhaps charging more for the first license/puppy license fee. She also stated that raising the cap on license fees met with a lot of resistance at the General Assembly.
- Mr. Land commented that Delegate Orrock has stated in the past that compliance with licensing needs to increase before fees do. Mr. Land also mentioned that he thinks a centralized registry may be helpful.
- Ms. Herrington commented that raising license fees would be very unpopular and thinks that compliance would decrease if licenses became more expensive. She also expressed concern about the privacy and ability to search within a statewide database.

- Ms. Starr expressed concern about a statewide database as it relates to the ability someone would have to FOIA the information.
- Ms. Reames offered that it would be important to consider and decide who would manage the database. Would it be a private contractor? Would it be a state agency?
- Ms. Griggs offered that perhaps we could try to assess if there was a way to arrive at a system that was neutral financially if information could be entered into a system quickly with the goal of identifying animals quickly and getting them home quickly so that they would not spend any time or very little time in a shelter. She also thought it would be helpful to inquire about what other states are doing and if there is a marketing strategy to encourage citizens to license their dogs.
- Ms. Condrey inquired about the process for licensing and vaccinating animals for rabies and also inquired if veterinarians typically used electronic medical records. She also inquired about what jurisdictions have microchip scanners that can be used in their cars and shelters.
- Ms. Griggs asked what was the incentive to owners to get their dogs licensed, beside punitive? Follow on suggestion was that there needs to be an incentive. Further thought/discussion from another group member suggested microchip licensing be cheaper to the citizen/owner than tag licensing.
- Ms. Reames inquired as to why historically was dog licensing put in place? Group responses indicated it was to prove ownership; provide indemnity for livestock killing; later it was for rabies compliance as well.
- A suggestion/thought from the group, stated that if microchips were used it would be necessary to change data in the system easily when ownership of the animal changes.
- Mr. Land commented that his main interest is increasing the quality of service available at the local level.
- Dr. Murphy asked members of the group to generate a list of questions that would be important to ask the treasurers as part of the resolutions directive to “review Virginia’s companion animal licensing procedures.”
- A comment was made that dogs should be the focus of this task force given the time frame/deadline of this group. The group discussion and consensus agreed that cats and other companion animals licensing may need to be addressed in the future and can be noted in the final summary as issues that came up but were beyond the scope of this task force.
- Dr. Bissett remarked that she thought, based on the discussion thus far, that there were at least three groups we needed to gather additional information from: county treasurers, veterinarians and animal control officers. She also mentioned that we needed to gather more specific information about any information technology that would apply to our directive to “assess the feasibility of establishing a statewide system for recording rabies vaccinations and licensing that may include a statewide database of licensed companion animals that can be remotely accessed by animal control officers in the field.”

- A question Mr. Gray thought would be important to ask in regard to the treasurers is how many treasurers are interested in a statewide database/statewide solution to licensing and would any want to opt out?
- Ms. Meinzer asked how we will capture the information from owners who have their dogs vaccinated in other states. She also asked how appropriate or how possible would it be for a representative from a microchip company to address the group.
- Susan Seward offered that perhaps the Pet Industry Joint Advisory Council might be engaged to talk about microchips.
- Other concepts discussed included the need to minimize the use of the local shelter as much as possible and exploring what incentives owners have for licensing animals and how the information is used.
- Dr. Rucker emphasized that veterinarians do not want to be the regulators or the gatekeepers associated with licensing. Since, however, the veterinarians are already involved with the process of forwarding the rabies vaccination certificates associated with the dogs they vaccinate, if the procedure to uniquely identify the certificate associated with a dog, such as a bar code supplied by the county, could be attached to each certificate, then that may be acceptable to veterinarians
- Mr. Leinberger mentioned that the Dangerous Dog Registry is already accessible by animal control officers and it may be worth exploring or a similar program in regard to a computer platform that could be used in regard to licensing information. Mr. Leinberger stated the dangerous dog registry is an example of a database where ACOs can see more info than the general public. This aspect of the dangerous dog database could be used similarly for licensing dogs.
- Ms. Griggs asked what efforts are made to discover noncompliance in regard to licensing.
- Dr. Rucker asked how much is it worth to the state to make adjustments or changes to the current system. How much does the licensing process cost now? If this process was changed, how much money would be saved?
- Dr. Rucker suggested that the savings of having a system that may lead to dogs being kept in shelters for a lesser period of time be quantified.
- Mr. Land asked that total program cost be assessed
- What is the per head cost of returning dogs per year?
- Ms. Griggs suggested that another group that should be surveyed is owners and that this could be done by asking the veterinarians surveyed if they would ask some of their clients a few questions about this system.
- Question from the group—“What efforts are currently made to discover non-compliance by ACOs?”
- Question from the group—“Who would house the database if there was a central registry?”

Public Comment

The main public comments associated with this meeting were associated with the potential benefits of raising licensing fees and a caution about a statewide database being subject to the Freedom of Information Act.

Action Items

It was decided that Dr. Murphy would generate several lists of questions for county treasurers, veterinarians and animal control officers and the general public. These, along with a meeting summary and minutes, will be distributed to the work group for review and comment by Friday, April 29. The work group members will then have one week to offer feedback and by Friday, May 6, the goal will be to have a list of questions for each of these groups that will be distributed via the work group participants representing the County Treasures Association, the Virginia Veterinary Medical Association (VVMA) and the Virginia Animal Control Association. The VVMA will also be asked to solicit feedback from clients to understand the consumer's/member of the general public's perspective on these issues.

Concepts discussed that were identified as important, but beyond the scope and limits of this work group's study timeline:

- Mr. Gray offered for consideration that companion animals can be defined broadly and that nonhuman primate and exotic animal identification/microchipping is important