

SHELTER LAW WEBINAR SERIES

NEW ANIMAL WELFARE LAWS FOR 2026

January 7, 2026



This session provided by SF SPCA and its “Shelter PALS” program

- » Shelter Policy and Legal Services (SPALS):
 - Free legal services CA shelters & rescues
 - SPALS lawyers consult and advise on any animal welfare issues in shelters/the community
 - Best practices
 - Holding periods
 - Intake considerations and legalities
 - Veterinary issues
 - Community Cat Programs
 - Access to veterinary care
 - Protective custody
 - Humane Law Enforcement

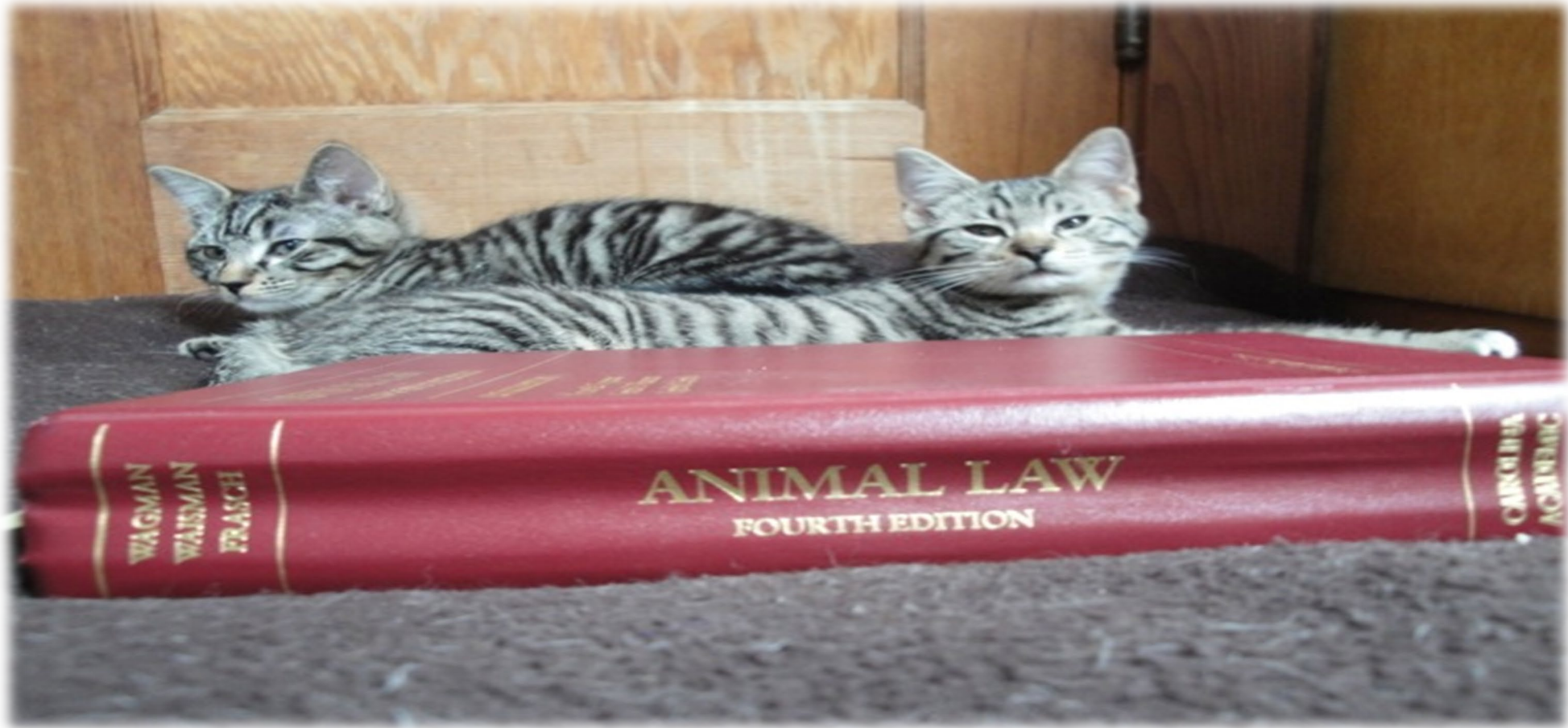


AGENDA



A PROGRAM OF THE SF SPCA

1. What important laws impacting shelters and California pets went into effect on January 1, 2026?
2. What do they say/mean?
3. How can shelters use them to optimize efficiency and care?
4. What's on the horizon for new shelter-related laws?
5. Q+A



What “the village” did for the animals this year – The big picture

- » Expanded access to veterinary care for public and shelter animals – through vaccine clinics and RVT skillset expansion
- » Shut down three more options to stop puppy millers from sending their animals to unsuspecting Californians
- » Prohibited nontherapeutic domestic cat declawing
- » Increased potential for reunification in disasters

AB 516 – growing the list of RVT skills/tasks

[Amending Business & Professions Code section 4840]

- » Why it was needed: For decades, veterinarians and RVTs have been uncertain about the scope of RVT practice. Many veterinarians prohibit RVTs from engaging in practices that are clearly allowed, because they did not realize these were permissible under CA law.
- » What the law says :
 - If it is a health care task not specifically prohibited by law, RVTs can do it!
(Subject to appropriate supervision by veterinarians)
 - Affirmative declaration that RVTs can do dentals
- » What it does : provides simple clarifying statement with far-reaching consequences for good
- » Using it in practice :
 - Expands what RVTs can do in shelters without veterinarians onsite
 - Veterinarians can feel more comfortable assigning tasks
 - RVTs can advocate/explain to employers what they can do
 - RVTs can seek education and expand their current scope of practice



California Business and Professions Code Section 4840(a)

RVT / VA legal authority to
perform health care tasks



B&P 4840

Registered veterinary technicians and veterinary assistants are approved to perform those animal health care services not prohibited by law under the supervision of a veterinarian licensed or authorized to practice in this state.

“Supervision” Definitions

DIRECT Supervision

01. A proper veterinarian-client-patient relationship has been established previously (including telemedicine), with respect to planned tasks/treatment; and,
02. The veterinarian is **physically present at the location** where tasks are performed and is quickly and easily available.

INDIRECT Supervision

01. A proper veterinarian-client-patient relationship has been established previously (including telemedicine), with respect to planned tasks/treatment; and,
02. The veterinarian does not need to be **physically present at the location** where tasks are performed but has given either written or oral instructions (“direct orders”) for treatment of the animal patient. *[NB the veterinarian does not need to be available.]*

What RVTs (and veterinary assistants) **cannot** do

- » Veterinarian-Only functions:
 - **Surgery**
 - **Diagnosis/prognosis**
 - **Prescriptions**



16 CCR 2036 (a)

What RVTs can do UNDER DIRECT SUPERVISION only



16 CCR 2036 (b)

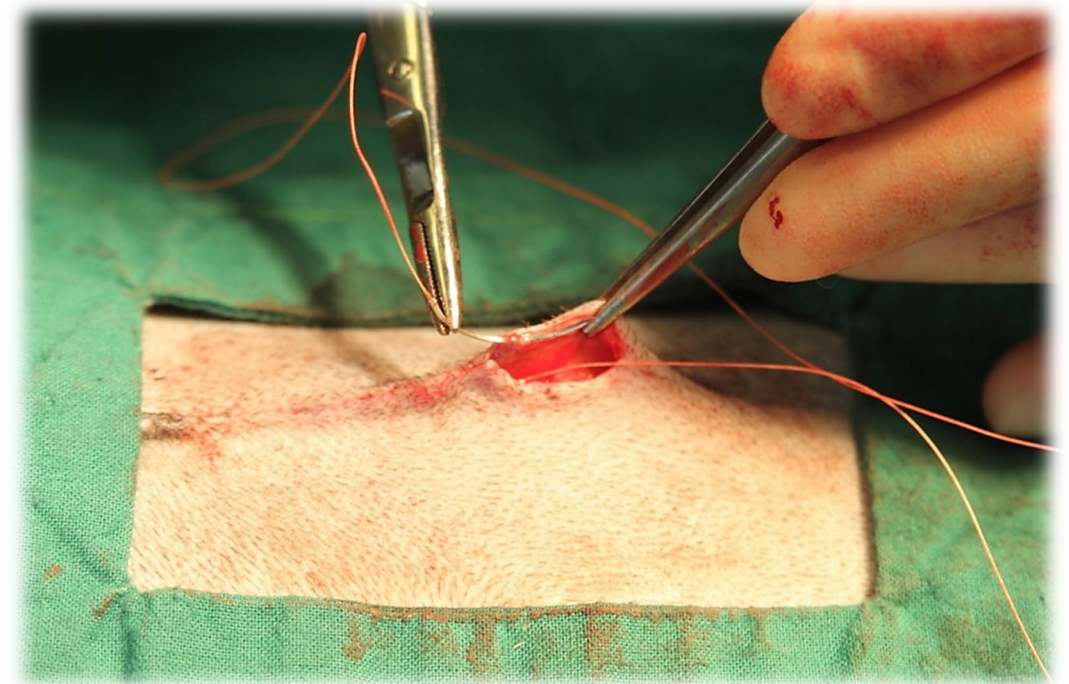
Induce anesthesia

Perform dental extractions

Suture cutaneous and subcutaneous tissues, gingiva, and oral mucous membranes

Create a relief hole in the skin to facilitate placement of an intravascular catheter

Drug compounding from bulk substances



SFSPCA

What RVTs can do UNDER INDIRECT SUPERVISION



16 CCR 2036 (c)

Administer controlled substances

Apply casts and splints

Drug compounding from non-bulk substances



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What VAs can do



16 CCR 2036.5

» Under direct or indirect supervision of a veterinarian

Or

» Under direct supervision of an RVT:

- VAs and VACSP holders may perform “auxiliary animal health care tasks” at a level of supervision equal to or greater than that for RVT
- VACSPs may administer controlled substances



So what are Auxiliary Health Care Tasks?

Auxiliary (adj): providing supplementary or additional help and support

Each practice may define what these tasks are based on the discretion of the supervising veterinarian, and the experience, skills and training of the Veterinary Assistants.

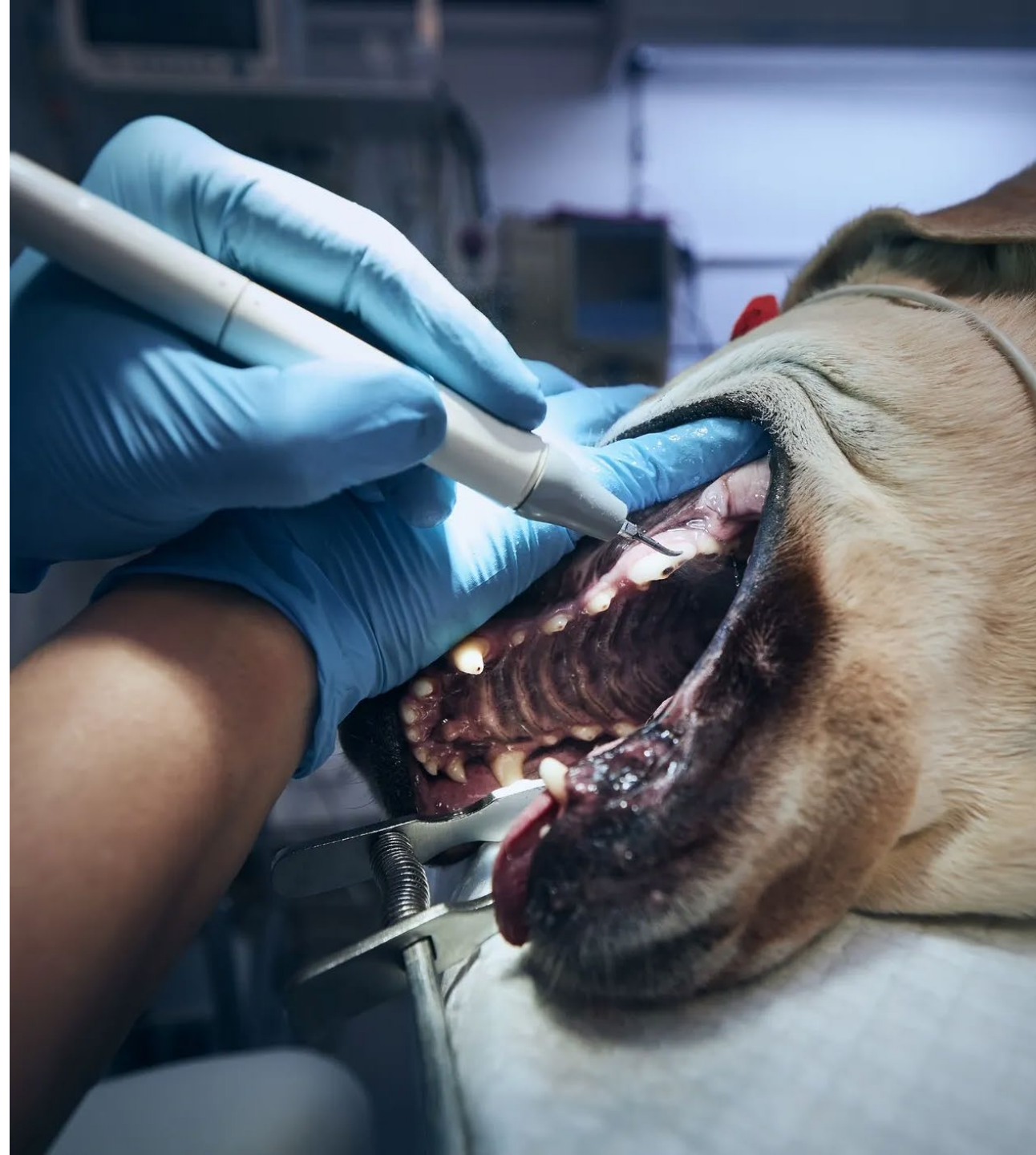
- E.g., urine collection from bladder (cystocentesis) and similar practices
- E.g., specialty practices and appropriate training



Example Auxiliary Health Care Task

Dental Cleaning

- » Veterinarian chooses anesthetic protocol
- » Veterinarian or RVT induces anesthesia
- » Veterinarian examines mouth- determines what needs to be done, directs RVT or VA to do it.
- » RVT/VA complete the dental cleaning
- » If teeth need to be extracted, either an RVT or the veterinarian can extract them -- VAs cannot.



Example Auxiliary Health Care Task

Foxtail Extraction

- » Veterinarian chooses sedation/ anesthetic protocol
- » RVT or VA administers sedation (or, if required, RVT or veterinarian induces anesthesia)
- » RVT or VA extracts foxtail(s)



RVTs can act in an emergency to help animals



RVTs can perform lifesaving, emergency care, pursuant to 16 CCR 4836

If a veterinarian is not present, once the “emergency” is over, further care may only be continued under the direction of a licensed veterinarian.

“Emergency” means a “life-threatening condition where immediate treatment is necessary”.



16 CCR 2069



BPC 4836



B&P 4840.5

Examples of emergency and lifesaving care

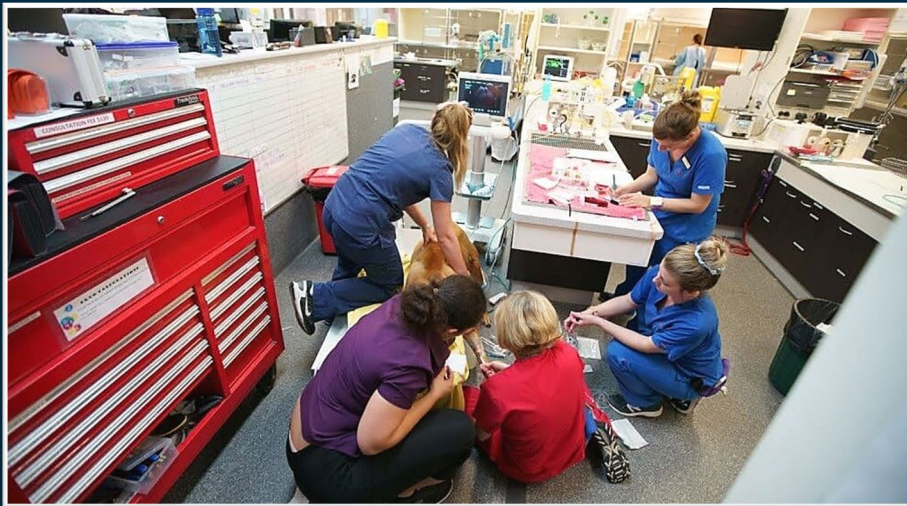


16 CCR 2069

01. Application of tourniquets and/or pressure bandages to control hemorrhage.
02. Resuscitative oxygen procedures.
03. Establishing open airways including intubation appliances but excluding surgery.
04. External cardiac resuscitation.
05. Application of temporary splints or bandages to prevent further injury to bones or soft tissues.
06. Application of appropriate wound dressings and external supportive treatment in severe burn cases
07. External supportive treatment in heat prostration cases.

Protection from liability for emergency care

- RVTs and their employer veterinarians are not liable for any civil damages for acts or omissions by the RVT in emergency, unless RVT was “grossly negligent”



B&P 4840.6

Special Laws for Shelter RVTs and VAs

For shelters with NO premises
permit

California Business and Professions Code Section 4827(a)(5)



If an animal shelter **is not a registered veterinary premises, and** only provides veterinary care to animals in the shelter population (i.e., the shelter does not have a traditional veterinary hospital that the public uses for services for their pets), shelter staff may:

- Administer vaccines
- Administer parasite control medications
- Administer medications prescribed by a veterinarian

*Training and protocols written by a veterinarian are required



RVT legal authority to perform animal healthcare in shelters **without a premises permit**

California Business and Professions Code Section 4840(b)



B&P 4840

1. Registered veterinary technicians may perform animal health care services on those animals impounded by a state, county, city, or city and county agency pursuant to the direct order, **written order**, or telephonic order of a veterinarian licensed or authorized to practice in this state
2. Orders may include:
 - A. Required assessment time periods (intake and ongoing).
 - B. Protocols for common medical conditions in shelters.
 - C. Protocols for controlling infectious and zoonotic diseases and for preventing environmental contamination.
 - D. Protocols for controlling acute pain.
 - E. Communication requirements between the registered veterinary technician and the supervising veterinarian.
 - F. Euthanasia criteria for medically related cases.



Special Laws for Shelter RVTs



DEA Registration for the specific purchase of sodium pentobarbital

- RVT must be an employee of an animal control shelter or humane society
- RVT must have received euthanasia certification training (Certified Euthanasia Technician/CET)
- Euthanasia must be for sick, injured, homeless or surrendered domestic pets or animals



B&P 4840 (a)



B&P 4827
(a)(4)(5)

SB 602 – expanding vaccine clinic potential

[Amending Business & Professions Code section 4826.7]

- » Why it was needed: SB 669 (2024) allowed shelters **without VMB premises permits** to have an RVT establish the mandatory Veterinarian-Client-Patient-Relationship (VCPR) as an agent of the veterinarian, without a veterinarian onsite, but shelters (and all private practices) with premises permits still needed an onsite veterinarian.
- » What the law says: the VCPR proxy for wellness clinics is allowed in a registered veterinary premises that is a public animal control agency or shelter, private animal shelter, humane society shelter, or society for the prevention of cruelty to animals shelter.
- » What it does: greatly expands shelters' abilities to give vaccine and wellness appointments without the supervising veterinarian onsite.
- » Using it in practice :
 - Low cost and free vaccine clinics can be offered by any California shelter, with a veterinarian agreeing to have the RVT establish the VCPR
 - All requirements under Business & Professions Code section 4826.7 still apply

RVTs can act as veterinarian's agent and establish a VCPR in limited situations

Purpose: To provide easier delivery of preventive or prophylactic vaccines or medications for the control or eradication of parasites.

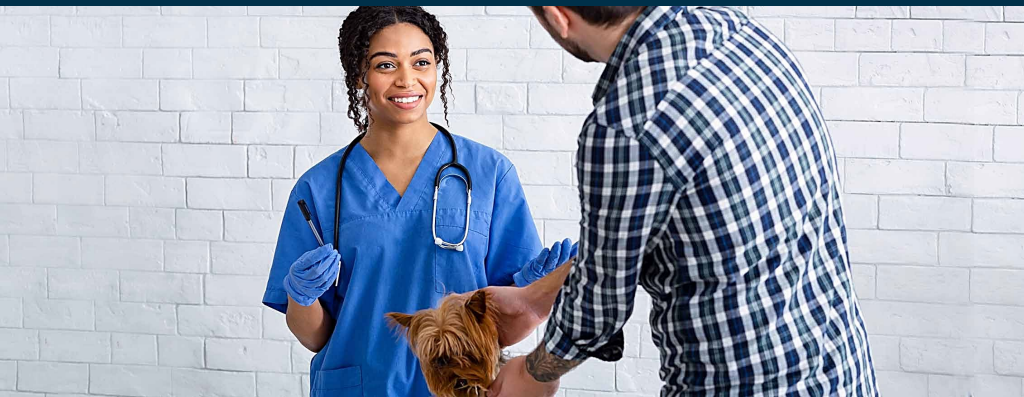
Practice: Subject to requirements and protocols, RVTs can create a VCPR for their supervising veterinarian



B&P 4826.7



B&P 4840

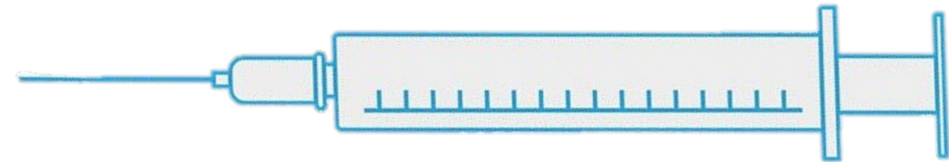


Limited Scope of RVT VCPR proxy



For TWO specific purposes ONLY:

1. To administer preventive or prophylactic vaccines and/or,
2. To administer medications for the control or eradication of apparent or anticipated internal or external parasites.



Paperwork



Sample Vet/RVT Agreement



Sample Protocols

For the RVT VCPR proxy, the supervising veterinarian must establish written protocols including:

- ✓ Required patient history information
- ✓ Required physical exam data
- ✓ History or physical exam data that would disqualify the patient from receiving a vaccine or parasite control medication
- ✓ Vaccine and parasite control medication protocols
- ✓ Specified medical record information that must be collected and recorded
- ✓ Signed authorization statement that designates and permits the RVT to act as an agent of the veterinarian for establishing a VCPR in vaccine and parasite control appointments
- ✓ A signed assumption of risk statement indicating that the veterinarian assumes responsibility for any risk associated with the RVT acting as their agent (short of willful/ gross misconduct by the RVT)
- ✓ A notation in the patient record that the RVT notified the client that they are acting as an agent of the veterinarian

Required supervision where RVT establishes VCPR

In a registered veterinary premises **that is not** a shelter, humane society, SPCA...

Supervising veterinarian must be physically present on the premises

In shelters/humane societies that are registered veterinary premises, and in any shelter without a premises permit

Supervising veterinarian must be in the general vicinity or quickly and easily available by telephone

Vaccination Clinic requirements – short list

- » Before vaccinating, RVT must inform the client orally or in writing that the RVT is acting as an agent of the veterinarian for the designated purposes, and provide the veterinarian's name/license number to the client.
- » RVT must have equipment and drugs necessary to provide immediate emergency care expected in clinic settings.
- » The veterinarian must be “quickly and easily available” by telephone, if not in the “general vicinity” of the clinic.
- » A California licensed DVM must “establish” written protocols and procedures for the RVT(s) running the clinic, found in BPC 4826.7(b)(3)(A-G).
- » The DVM and RVT must sign documents regarding:
 1. DVM's assumption of legal risks
 2. RVT's authorization to establish VCPR for sole purpose of clinic activities (“administering preventive or prophylactic vaccines or medications for the control or eradication of apparent or anticipated internal or external parasites”)
- *Note that RVT is limited to these tasks; if an RVT encounters an abnormal physical finding, or is asked to do anything by the client other than the above, the law does not apply either to the VCPR or any related treatment.*

AB 478 – Including pets in emergency response programs

[Adding Government Code sections 8593.11 and 53074.1]

- » Why it was needed: in disasters, pets may be lost or left behind, and rescue efforts may be delayed or thwarted. This law establishes protocols for local emergency disaster response programs, to increase the potential for reunification and rescue of animals impacted by these events.
- » What the law says:
 - Designates procedures for the rescue of a pet from an area subject to an evacuation order
 - Only with approval and in the discretion of the incident commander/emergency management authority.
 - *No adoption/euthanasia for 30 days of pets who came from areas subject to evacuation order*
- » What it does: provides a new, mandated level of protection for pets, but with a potentially serious impact on shelters due to the 30-day holding period
- » Using it in practice: in these situations, transfer to other partners when possible to limit burden on shelters

AB 867– prohibits nontherapeutic declawing of domestic cats

[Adding Business & Professions Code section 4830.9]

- » Why it was needed: Animal welfare opposition to declawing has been ongoing for years. *See California Veterinary Medical Ass'n v. City of West Hollywood*, 152 Cal. App. 4th 536 (2007).
- » What the law says: prohibits tendonectomy, onychectomy, or any type of claw removal on a domestic feline.
- » What it does: ends the practice of declawing for reasons unrelated to the health of the cat.
- » Using it in practice: Veterinarians can lose their license for performing elective, nontherapeutic declawing.



AB 506 – First of three -- the puppymill pipeline triumvirate of laws

[Adding Health and Safety Code sections 122225 *et. seq.*]

- » Why it was needed: Despite several laws passed to stop the flow of puppymill puppies (and cats and rabbits), they are still coming into the state by the tens of thousands.
- » What the law says:
 - Prohibits nonrefundable deposits for transfers of any kind.
 - Sellers of dogs, cats, or rabbits to a purchaser located in California must disclose the original source and medical information.
 - Purchaser can sue for violations and get attorneys fees and costs.
 - Does not apply to shelters or municipal agencies.
- » What it does: Eliminates sharp dealing and misrepresentation; allows protection of consumers through the courts or by the state.
- » Using it in practice: Enforcement available at the public and private level, to go after violators.

AB 519 – second of three -- the puppy mill pipeline triumvirate of laws

[Adding Health and Safety Code sections 122365 *et. seq.*]

- » Why it was needed: In order to avoid the prior restrictions under California law, pet “brokers” were selling puppy mill animals by the thousands, and treating them poorly.
- » What the law says:
 - Prohibits a “broker” from offering/effecting transfer of a dog under one year of age, a cat, or rabbit.
 - “Broker” is a person or business involved in the sale of dogs, cats, or rabbits bred by another for profit. Now treated like a retail pet store.
- » What it does: Closes loophole that allowed puppy millers to continue selling to Californians through brokers.
- » Using it in practice: Enforcement possible if law enforcement and municipalities are willing, and brokers can be identified. But hopefully most brokers will pull out of the business.



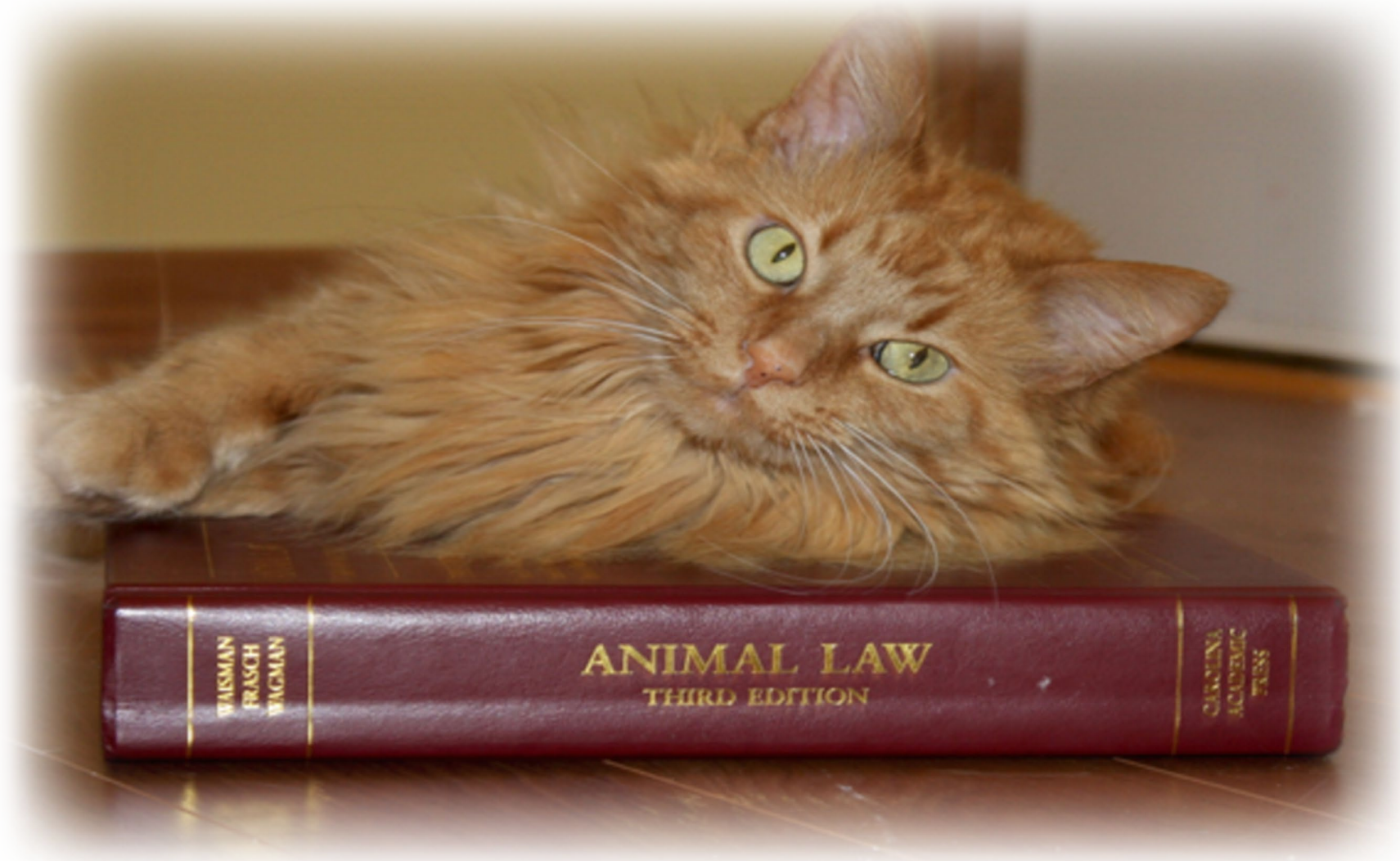
SB 312 – third of three -- the puppymill pipeline triumvirate of laws

[Adding Food & Ag Code sections 3100 *et. seq.*]

- » Why it was needed: Because of lack of compliance with existing law, health certificates for imported animals were largely unavailable. These certificates provide valuable information to allow tracking of animals imported and knowing their history.
- » What the law says:
 - Anyone selling/transporting/importing a dog into the state for sale must submit to the Department of Food and Agriculture and the buyer, a health certificate for the dog that has been completed by a licensed veterinarian.
 - Statute also specifies information required, and makes health certificates available as public record on a state-run website, with five-year retention.
- » What it does: Ensures access to/information about imported dogs.
- » Using it in practice: Interested parties can access documents to track and identify trends, problems, that could expose animal suffering.

What to fix in '26

- » Changing the VCPR requirements
- » Limiting the owner exemption
- » Shelter license for veterinarians
- » Retired license for volunteer veterinarians
- » Expanding access to High Quality High Volume Spay Neuter programs



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Q+A

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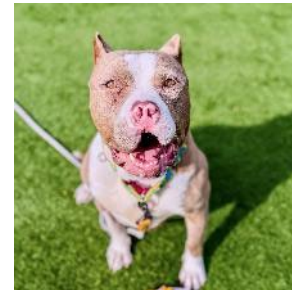
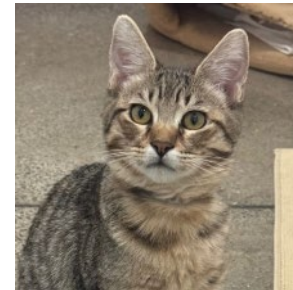
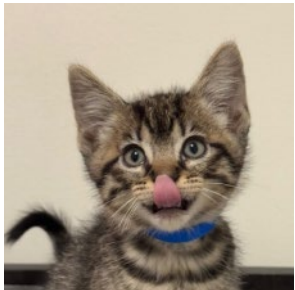
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THANK YOU



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