

Miranda Gallo
Yarmouth
LD 1220

Dear Senator Bailey, Representative Gramlich and honorable members of the Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services Committee,
I am Miranda Gallo and I'm a resident of Yarmouth and I am submitting testimony in opposition of LD 1220, An Act Allow Chiropractors to Treat Dogs and Equids. I'm concerned there is risk to veterinary patients' welfare when practitioners without training in veterinary care begin performing physical manipulations on them.

I am a board certified veterinary neurologist practicing at Maine Veterinary Medical Center in Scarborough. I treat primarily dogs and cats, and work with dogs with back pain on a daily basis. Patients with back pain are not infrequently brought to me having been incorrectly managed due to the challenge of localizing discomfort in a patient that can't speak to communicate. Without specialized physical examination and clinical experience, or the requirement for referral by a veterinarian, I worry human chiropractors will not accurately assess their veterinary patient's condition. This could lead to inappropriate interventions that are either dangerous - causing new or progressive spinal injury, or ineffective because they are an irrelevant treatment for the actual condition. Without involvement of a veterinarian how would the chiropractor know the cause of the owner's observations? Taking the owners' findings at face value without experienced, input by a veterinarian provides the illusion of the patient being "treated" but really could allow for the underlying problem going undiagnosed, and thus untreated. Chiropractic care could never treat conditions such as spinal tumors, autoimmune inflammation of the spinal cord (myelitis), infection of the intervertebral disc space and bone (discospondylitis), or disc herniation compressing the spinal cord. All of these conditions can present with back pain as a solitary initial symptoms, and chiropractic care would serve only to delay appropriate diagnosis and treatment if performed in the absence of veterinary guidance, as LD 1220 would allow.

A primary cause of canine back pain is intervertebral disc disease caused by degenerative disc transformation. Unlike in humans, acute, severe disc extrusions occur regularly in dogs due to diffuse degeneration and dehydration of the discs that is genetic in certain dog breeds, being present from birth and not only as the pet ages. The common result of disc herniation in dogs is weakness in the back legs, that varies in severity and often progresses to the loss of ability to walk or even paralysis. High impact movements - where abrupt forces travel through the spinal column - are the moments when these acute disc extrusions occur. I have seen dogs who catastrophically herniate discs while doing things as simple and unassuming as posturing to defecate, turning quickly to greet another dog, or jumping off of a couch not even 2 feet off the ground. In humans, disc disease is a different entity all together. It is often related to aging changes that cause a chronic, gradual protrusion of the disc, affecting the region of the spinal column where only nerve roots are present (lumbosacral region) - making pain common, but spinal cord dysfunction uncommon. I worry that chiropractors accustomed to working with human intervertebral disc disease will apply manipulations and adjustments to canine patients that are experiencing pain from acute disc disease, which then could worsen or trigger a disc herniation that results in spinal cord injury. These are small patients, with huge amounts of breed variation, who are more susceptible to disc herniations precipitated by the very same abrupt movements and wear and tear that are replicated by chiropractic adjustments. I advise my clients to not undergo any chiropractic care if they have had back pain for this reason.

Animals are not little humans. They are unable to speak or communicate during procedures in the same ways that safeguard against harm during chiropractic care for human patients. Sanctioning chiropractic care without the input, guidance, and referral by a veterinarian is a disservice to veterinary patient welfare.

Thank you for your consideration of this matter.

Miranda Gallo