

Testimony of Donald E. Hoenig, VMD, Belfast, Maine in opposition to LD 1220

Dear Senator Bailey, Representative Gramlich and honorable members of the Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services Committee. My name is Don Hoenig. I am a resident of Belfast and I am submitting testimony in opposition of *LD 1220, An Act Allow Chiropractors to Treat Dogs and Equids*.

I've been a veterinarian since graduating from the University of Pennsylvania School of Veterinary Medicine in 1978. You may be aware that to earn a veterinary degree, veterinarians generally attend four years of undergraduate education and then complete four years of instruction at an American Veterinary Medical Association-accredited (AVMA) veterinary school—for a total of eight years of post-secondary education. There are 33 U.S. veterinary schools, five Canadian schools and 16 foreign schools.

I've been a Maine-licensed veterinarian since 1983. In my 42 years as a licensed Maine veterinarian, I have worked in private mixed animal practice in Belfast, been employed as a field veterinarian by the US Department of Agriculture for five years in the mid-1980s and worked for the Maine Department of Agriculture for 26 years before I retired in 2012. For the last 17 years of my state employment, I was the State Veterinarian and the State Public Health veterinarian. After my retirement, I completed a yearlong AVMA Congressional Fellowship in the Office of Senator Susan Collins. Following the Fellowship, I started a new venture of veterinary consulting in farm animal welfare, public health and wildlife rabies. I've participated in three missions to Africa for the World Organization for Animal Health.

While it's true that I am the Chair of the Maine Veterinary Licensing Board, I am testifying today only as a licensed veterinarian and not in my role as the Board Chair.

This bill is hugely flawed and problematic on several levels.

1. There is no definition of what constitutes animal chiropractic. The Maine Veterinary Practice Act contains specific language defining veterinary practice, and this language is totally absent in LD 1220.
2. There is nothing LD 1220 pertaining to enforcement. The Maine Chiropractic Board has no experience in evaluating malpractice by chiropractors on dogs or horses nor should we expect them to. How could they since they did not receive any education on these species during their schooling?
3. LD 1220 requires a "210 hour course of chiropractic instruction in animal chiropractic care as approved by the board." 210 hours to substitute for four years of veterinary education? Allow me to flip the script here and ask you this: Would you think a veterinarian who wished to provide obstetric care to pregnant women could become qualified after a 210 hour course in human obstetrics? (Actually, 48 years ago I did deliver my son but it was in presence of and under the direct supervision of my wife's obstetrician.)
4. There is a provision in LD 1220 that would allow chiropractors to perform chiropractic on dogs or horses without a veterinary referral if the chiropractor had received eight hours of instruction in contagious, infectious and zoonotic diseases and one hour of instruction in animal chiropractic care jurisprudence. It's preposterous and insulting to think that eight hours of instruction could supplant numerous semester-long courses on these topics in veterinary school. As

All veterinarians take an oath upon earning their diploma. Here is that oath. "Being admitted to the profession of veterinary medicine, I solemnly swear to use my scientific knowledge and skills for the benefit of society through the protection of animal health and welfare, the prevention and relief of animal suffering, the conservation of resources, the promotion of public health, and the advancement of medical knowledge. I will practice my profession conscientiously, with dignity and in keeping with the principles of veterinary ethics. I accept as a lifelong obligation the continual improvement of my professional

knowledge and competence.” My last concern with this legislation is that members of the chiropractic profession do not share the principles elucidated in this oath and, in particular, are not committed to the health and welfare of animals.

I’ll conclude by stating that I do not object to chiropractors treating dogs and horses under the supervision of a Maine-licensed veterinarian if a definition of supervision could be specified by rule or statute. I urge you to vote “ought not to pass” on this deeply flawed bill.

Thank you very much. I’m happy to take questions.

Don Hoenig  
Belfast, Maine  
LD 1220

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