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Testimony of Representative Vicki Doudera presenting
**LD 528, An Act to Address the Rise in Rabies in Animals by Appointing
Certified Rabies Vaccine Administrators**
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry

Good afternoon, Senator Talbot Ross, Representative Pluecker and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry. My name is Vicki Doudera and I represent House District 41, Camden and Rockport.

I am here before you today to present **LD 528, An Act to Address the Rise in Rabies in Animals by Appointing Certified Rabies Vaccine Administrators**. I've worked on this bill with our state's Animal Welfare Advisory Council, and you have before you an amended version which merely cleans up the language a bit.

Rabies is a virus that is deadly to humans and has been a public health issue for more than a century. Wild animals (here in Maine the culprits are chiefly skunks, foxes, bats and racoons) carry and transmit the disease. Looking at data from our state Center for Disease Control and Prevention, it's alarming that in 2023 there were more than double the number of positive cases than were seen in all of 2022.¹ It was the largest increase in over 10 years. In 2024, the number of cases declined slightly – by 13 cases.

The rabies virus is usually transmitted by the bite of an infected animal. Virus in their saliva gets into the muscle, and travels slowly up the nerves to the brain.

Once in the brain, the virus starts replicating rapidly. This is when an animal or a human starts showing scary signs. A veterinary epidemiologist and lead for the Rabies

¹ <https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/mecdc/infectious-disease/epi/zoonotic/rabies/index.shtml>

Team at CDC in Washington notes that "It's almost impossible to come back after that. The virus' goal is to make you act abnormal so it can spread to the next animal."²

Rabies disrupts the nervous system, changing the body's ability to regulate heart rate and blood pressure, sometimes causing seizures and heart attacks. The virus can lead to severe swelling in the brain and spinal cord. It migrates to the salivary glands, shedding through saliva and drool. For a patient showing these symptoms, there's no cure at this stage and most die.

The way to prevent this in humans is to avoid getting bitten by a rabid animal; or to get a series of shots soon after, before symptoms appear, to stop the virus from getting to the brain. The way to prevent this in pets is to vaccinate them before they get exposed, and that is where this bill comes in.

Currently only a veterinarian can administer a rabies vaccine. This is problematic because:

- There is a real shortage of veterinarians in Maine.
- It can take months to get an appointment with a veterinarian and many practices are not currently accepting new patients.
- There are not enough veterinarians to staff vaccine clinics so those are happening less frequently.

LD 528 seeks to create Certified Rabies Vaccine Administrators, which will increase the number of trained individuals able to lawfully administer a rabies vaccine. This would be a narrow, but important, expansion that would include state Humane Agents and certain approved licensed veterinary technicians. **No additional funding will be necessary. This is a no-cost solution to a problem involving a deadly disease.**

In addition to the state's Animal Welfare Advisory Council, this bill is supported by the Animal Welfare Program, Office of the State Veterinarian, Maine Federation of Humane Societies and the Humane Society of the United States.

Thank you and I am happy to answer any questions.

"It would perhaps not be amiss to point out that he had always tried to be a good dog. He had tried to do all the things his MAN and his WOMAN, and most of all his BOY, had asked or expected of him. He would have died for them, if that had been required. He had never wanted to kill anybody. He had been struck by something, possibly destiny, or fate, or only a degenerative nerve disease called rabies. Free will was not a factor."

— Stephen King, *Cujo*

²<https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2023/10/11/1205016558/canine-vaccine-hesitancy-dogs-rabies#:~:text=From%20a%20bite%20to%20the,them%20before%20they%20get%20exposed.>

Amendment to LD 528
An Act to Address the Rise in Rabies in Animals by Appointing Certified Rabies Vaccine
Administrators
Proposed by Representative Doudera
March 12, 2025 REVISED

Amend the bill in section 1 as follows:

Sec. 1. 7 MRSA §1808-A, 2nd ¶, as enacted by PL 2001, c. 308, §1, is amended to read:

An animal vaccinated against rabies by a person who is not a licensed veterinarian, a certified rabies vaccinator appointed and certified pursuant to section 3920 or a licensed veterinary technician under the indirect supervision of a licensed veterinarian or under the direct supervision of a licensed veterinarian may not be certified as vaccinated against rabies and must be treated as an unvaccinated animal under Title 22, chapter 251, subchapter 5 and rules adopted pursuant to that chapter. For purposes of this section, “licensed veterinary technician” has the same meaning as in Title 32, section 4853, subsection 11; “indirect supervision” has the same meaning as in Title 32, section 4853, subsection 4-B; and “licensed veterinarian” has the same meaning as in Title 32, section 4853, subsection 5.

Amend the bill in section 4 as follows:

Sec. 4. 7 MRSA §3916, as amended by PL 2021, c. 99, §§6 and 7, is further amended to read:

§3916. Rabies vaccinations

1. Required for cats. Except as provided in subsection 4, an owner or keeper of a cat over 3 months of age ~~must~~ shall have that cat vaccinated against rabies. ~~Rabies The rabies vaccine must be administered by a licensed veterinarian, a licensed veterinary technician under the indirect supervision of a licensed veterinarian, or under the supervision of a licensed veterinarian or by a certified rabies vaccinator under the indirect supervision of a state veterinarian.~~ Upon receiving an initial vaccination, a cat is considered protected for one year and an owner or keeper of that cat ~~must~~ shall get a booster vaccination for that cat one year after the initial vaccination and subsequent booster vaccinations at intervals that do not exceed the intervals recommended by a national association of state public health veterinarians for the type of vaccine administered. For purposes of this chapter “licensed veterinary technician” has the same meaning as in Title 32, section 4853, subsection 11; “indirect supervision” has the same meaning as in Title 32, section 4853, subsection 4-B; and “licensed veterinarian” has the same meaning as in Title 32, section 4853, subsection 5.

1-A. Required for dogs. Except as provided in subsection 4, an owner or keeper of a dog, within 30 days after the dog attains ~~the age of 3 months~~ of age, shall have that dog vaccinated against rabies. ~~The rabies vaccine must be administered by a licensed veterinarian, a licensed veterinary technician under the indirect supervision of a licensed veterinarian, or by a certified rabies vaccinator under the indirect supervision of a state veterinarian.~~ Upon receiving an initial vaccination, a dog is considered protected for one year and an owner or keeper of that dog shall get a booster vaccination for that dog one year after the initial vaccination and subsequent booster vaccinations at intervals that do not exceed the intervals recommended by a national association of state public health veterinarians for the type of

vaccine administered. A wolf hybrid is required to be vaccinated in accordance with this subsection. The procedure prescribed under Title 22, chapter 251, subchapter 5 for a wolf hybrid suspected of having rabies does not change based on proof that the wolf hybrid has received a rabies vaccination.

2. Certificate. A licensed veterinarian who vaccinates or supervises the vaccination of a cat or dog, a licensed veterinary technician under the indirect supervision of a licensed veterinarian, or a certified rabies vaccinator who vaccinates a cat or dog shall issue to the owner or keeper a certificate of rabies vaccination approved by the State and shall indicate on the certificate the date by which a booster vaccination is required pursuant to subsection 1 or 1-A, whichever is applicable.

2-A. Notice to department. A veterinarian, a licensed veterinary technician under the indirect supervision of a licensed veterinarian, or certified rabies vaccinator who issues a certificate of rabies vaccination for a dog pursuant to subsection 2 shall, within 30 days of issuing the certificate, forward by mail, e-mail or fax a copy of that certificate to the department. The department shall send a copy of the certificate by mail, e-mail or fax to the clerk of the municipality in which the owner or keeper resides. If the owner or keeper resides in the unorganized territory, the department shall send a copy of the certificate to the dog recorder in that unorganized territory or, in the absence of a duly authorized dog recorder, to the dog recorder in the nearest municipality or unorganized territory in the same county in which the owner or keeper resides. The department may retain a copy or electronic record of the rabies certificate. The department may accumulate certificates received and distribute them periodically to the appropriate municipalities and dog recorders. Distributions must be made no fewer than 4 times a year.

3. Enforcement. A humane agent, an animal control officer or a law enforcement officer may ask an owner or keeper of a cat or dog to present proof of a certificate of rabies vaccination from the State.

4. Exception. Notwithstanding any provision of this chapter to the contrary, an animal shelter operated by a nonprofit organization is not required to vaccinate an abandoned or stray cat or dog received by the shelter.

An owner or keeper of a cat or dog is exempt from the requirements of subsection 1 or 1-A, whichever is applicable, if a medical reason exists that precludes the vaccination of the cat or dog. To qualify for this exemption, the owner or keeper must have a written statement signed by a licensed veterinarian that includes a description of the cat or dog and the medical reason that precludes the vaccination.

Amend the bill in section 5 as follows:

Sec. 5. 7 MRSA §3917, sub-§1, as amended by PL 1993, c. 468, §10, is further amended to read:

1. Clinic establishment. The department shall facilitate the establishment of low-cost antirabies clinics at locations and on dates as appropriate. At least one low-cost antirabies clinic must be conducted annually in each county. In facilitating the establishment of antirabies clinics, the department shall cooperate with local veterinarians and local organizations. When other arrangements ~~can not~~ cannot be made for a licensed veterinarian to vaccinate or to supervise vaccinations by an animal technician at a low-cost clinic, a veterinarian employed by the department, a licensed veterinary technician under the indirect supervision of a licensed veterinarian, or a certified rabies vaccinator shall administer the vaccinations.

Amend the bill in section 8 as follows:

Sec. 8. 7 MRSA §3923-B, sub-§2-A, as enacted by PL 1999, c. 254, §5, is amended to read:

2-A. Rabies tags. An owner or keeper shall ensure that a rabies tag obtained from a veterinarian, a licensed veterinary technician under the indirect supervision of a licensed veterinarian, or a certified rabies vaccinator for immunization against rabies is securely attached to a collar of leather, metal or material of comparable strength and that the collar is worn at all times by the dog for which the rabies tag was issued, except as provided in subsection 3. For purposes of this section “licensed veterinary technician” has the same meaning as in Title 32, section 4853, subsection 11; “indirect supervision” has the same meaning as in Title 32, section 4853, subsection 4-B; and “licensed veterinarian” has the same meaning as in Title 32, section 4853, subsection 5.

SUMMARY

This amendment explicitly adds licensed veterinary technicians under the direct supervision of a licensed veterinarian to those authorized to administer rabies vaccinations.