

- SUBJECT:** Mandatory rabies quarantines
- COMMITTEE:** Public Health — committee substitute recommended
- VOTE:** 8 ayes — Berlanga, Hirschi, Coleman, Glaze, Janek, Maxey, McDonald, Rodriguez  
0 nays  
1 absent — Delisi
- WITNESSES:** For — A. Brent Brenham, deputy city manager of McAllen  
Against — None  
On — Dr. Keith Clark, Texas Department of Health; John Herron, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department
- BACKGROUND:** Rabies is an acute viral disease of man and animal affecting the central nervous system usually transmitted by an animal bite. In July 1994 Gov. Ann Richards declared a state health emergency to combat rabies, and in January 1995 the Texas Board of Health declared a statewide rabies quarantine in response to an outbreak of canine rabies spreading northward from South Texas. The Hidalgo County Health Department reported eight confirmed cases from November 1994 to January 1995.  
  
In addition to the quarantine, two tractor-trailer loads of rabies vaccine-laced bait were dropped over a 19-county, 12,000-mile area from Maverick County between Eagle Pass and Laredo to a line between San Antonio and Corpus Christi.
- DIGEST:** CSHB 669 would require veterinarians to submit for quarantine animals in their possession that are known or suspected of having rabies or that have exposed an individual to rabies. Veterinarians, in addition to owners, would be required to submit an animal to a local health authority of the county or municipality in which a rabies exposure occurs. The bill would take effect immediately if approved by a two-thirds vote of the membership of each house.

**SUPPORTERS  
SAY:**

CSHB 669 would provide veterinarians and local health authorities greater authority to quarantine an animal suspected of carrying rabies. Rabies has killed four people in Texas since 1990, while 1,600 have undergone rabies inoculations. Since 1988 about 600 animals ranging from coyotes to cows have been diagnosed with rabies.

Veterinarians are the first line of defense against rabies and need clear authority to submit for quarantine an animal suspected of being rabid. In Edinburg a veterinarian who suspected an animal of having rabies recently was forced to surrender the animal to its owners. The owners, who insisted on taking the animal home with them, were both eventually infected with rabies. CSHB 669 would require veterinarians to quarantine animals suspected of carrying the disease, and it would give veterinarians and local health authorities the power to do so.

Veterinarians have always shown restraint in making the determination to quarantine an animal and would use good judgment in determining the conditions of such quarantines. No vet is likely to use this new authority to submit for quarantine an animal not showing clinical symptoms of rabies or to extend a quarantine for longer than necessary.

**OPPONENTS  
SAY:**

This bill might discourage some owners from taking uninoculated pets to their veterinarians for medical treatment, for fear of having the animal quarantined. Also, some limits should be set on the length of a quarantine; the Texas Department of Health suggests a 10-day quarantine period.

**NOTES:**

The committee substitute eliminated a requirement that the Board of Health establish a quarantine period of between 15 and 30 days. The substitute includes the emergency clause that would allow the bill to take effect immediately if approved by a two-thirds vote of the membership of each house.

Also on the calendar today is HB 721 by De la Garza, which would require veterinarians to quarantine animals suspected of having rabies, set new penalties for owners who fail to vaccinate animals and for persons who transport high-risk animals and impose other rabies control measures.