

SUBJECT: Allowing the veterinary board to commission and hire peace officers

COMMITTEE: Agriculture and Livestock — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 9 ayes — Springer, Anderson, Beckley, Buckley, Burns, Fierro, Meza,
Raymond, Zwiener

0 nays

WITNESSES: For — David Heflin and Sandra Leyendecker, Texas Veterinary Medical Association; (*Registered, but did not testify*: Chris Jones, CLEAT; David Sinclair, Game Warden Peace Officers Association; Elizabeth Choate, Texas Veterinary Medical Association)

Against — Greg Munson; Jodi Ware

On — John Helenberg, State Board of Veterinary Medical Examiners; Heather Kutyba; (*Registered, but did not testify*: Michael Tacker, State Board of Veterinary Medical Examiners)

DIGEST: HB 1099 would authorize the State Board of Veterinary Medical Examiners to employ and commission peace officers. Any person so employed and commissioned would have to be certified as qualified to be a peace officer by the Texas Commission on Law Enforcement. If the board commissioned peace officers, it would have to designate one as the chief investigator.

The bill would take immediate effect if finally passed by a two-thirds record vote of the membership of each house. Otherwise, it would take effect September 1, 2019.

SUPPORTERS SAY: HB 1099 would address problems relating to the intersection of veterinary medicine and crime. In allowing the board to hire peace officers, the bill would promote the safety and security of the people and animals affected by crimes related to veterinary medicine.

Veterinarians' offices are subject to theft because regulated drugs are often stored in them. Practicing veterinary medicine without a license can lead to illness, injury and death for animals. Law enforcement agencies are often too busy to investigate crimes like these, and they lack the specialized knowledge to do so. Without peace officer status, however, the investigators of the State Board of Veterinary Medical Examiners are unable to receive confidential information from other law enforcement professionals. By allowing the board to have its own dedicated officers, the bill would implement the best solution to these problems.

OPPONENTS
SAY:

HB 1099 would further distract an agency that needs to be more focused on its core mission. During its previous review cycle, the Sunset Advisory Commission admonished the State Board of Veterinary Medical Examiners for administrative issues that adversely affected both licensees and the public, which has not improved in the intervening period. The board needs to concentrate on its core administrative functions rather than taking on new tasks related to supervising peace officers.