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March 7, 2011

Assemblymember Curt Hagman
State Capitol
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Veterinary Support for AB 258 (Medical Exemption from Rabies Vaccination)

Dear Assemblymember Hagman:

The Humane Society Veterinary Medical Association (HSVMA), a national organization of veterinary professionals with a focus on the health and welfare of animals, is pleased to sponsor AB 258. This legislation, known as Molly's Bill, would establish a uniform and safe mechanism to allow exemption from rabies vaccination for those California dogs in whose cases a veterinarian determines such vaccination may be potentially lethal.

Vaccinations are a powerful medical tool with potentially powerful side effects. As veterinary professionals, we know that vaccinations should be administered only to animals for whom the medical benefits outweigh the potential medical risks. A small, but significant, number of companion animals have medical conditions for whom vaccination is contraindicated. These may include, but are not limited to, those with terminal diseases such as cancer, immune-mediated diseases, severe allergies and chronic life-threatening conditions such as renal failure, severe endocrine disorders and degenerative neuromuscular diseases. In such cases, the decision to vaccinate should be contingent upon the professional judgment of the veterinarian in the context of the overall medical condition of the animal. AB 258 is named after Molly, an English Springer Spaniel who contracted an autoimmune disorder and whose veterinarian recommended against vaccination due to the serious medical risks.

Numerous individual veterinarians and veterinary clinics, veterinary medical teaching institutions and professional associations support the necessity for selective exemption from vaccination. Dogs exempted under AB 258 would be medically evaluated by a veterinarian and monitored by local public health officials. The public may actually be put at greater potential risk for zoonotic disease without a vaccination exemption provision because pet owners who are deeply concerned about their dogs' health and are deprived of an exemption option, may choose to fly 'under the radar,' eluding both vaccination and licensing entirely.

This approach to protecting companion dog health and welfare is not without precedent. Many states, including Alabama, Florida, Colorado, Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, Rhode Island, Virginia and Wisconsin, have already implemented exemption from rabies vaccination programs while effectively preserving the public health.

AB 258 provides a safe and medically sound mechanism to protect California dogs whose health could be seriously compromised by vaccination. We thank you for introducing this important animal welfare legislation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Barbara Hodges". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Barbara Hodges, DVM, MBA
Veterinary Consultant
Humane Society Veterinary Medical Association