

Good morning Chairman Luick and members of the Senate Agriculture Committee. My name is Kirby Kruger, and I am the Director of the Division of Disease Control and the Medical Services Section Chief with the North Dakota Department of Health. I am here today to support Senate Bill 2092.

Before I address the proposed amendments, I would like to provide some background on rabies and rabies control in North Dakota. Rabies is a viral infection that affects the nervous system of people. It is found in the saliva and central nervous system tissues of infected animals. Rabies is usually transmitted from the bite of an infected animal. For all practical purposes, human rabies needs to be considered 100% fatal. Rabies cannot be cured but can be prevented through proper post-exposure immunizations. This requires that when notified of a possible rabies exposure, the Department of Health has the ability to ensure that a rabies exposure has been ruled out.

From 2014 through 2018, 66 cases of rabies have been reported in North Dakota. Please note that 2018 data is still preliminary. Here is a breakdown by species:

- Skunk 35 (53%)
- Bovine 12 (18%)
- Bat 8 (12%)
- Cat 6 (9%)
- Dog 2 (3%)
- Other 3 (5%)

The North Dakota Department of Health works with the Office of the State Veterinarian on many exposure situations. The Department of Health relies on two resources to guide its rabies control efforts. These are:

- the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) and
- the Association of State and Territorial Public Health Veterinarians.

This guidance is lengthy and gets updated periodically. North Dakota Administrative code 33-06-04 requires the Department of Health to use peer reviewed recommendations when taking disease control measures.

The proposed amendments to North Dakota Century Code 23-36 are being requested to simplify the language in statute regarding the control of rabies in North Dakota. The current language contains a variety of adjectives, such as vaccinated, unvaccinated, wild, domestic, unwanted and various combinations of these to describe various animals that can transmit rabies. These modifiers are not needed because whenever there is a possible exposure to rabies, there are usually some public health actions that are warranted. Even a vaccinated dog or cat needs to be observed for ten days if it bites a person. Exceptions are rare but may include exposures to small rodents and rabbits or hares.

We did include language that allows the Department of Health to take action if another animal was exposed or possibly exposed to rabies. The current law, as we understand it, allows for control measures to be taken only for human exposures. This law has never contained language requiring vaccination of animals. Many cities address this with city ordinances.

Here is a summary of the most notable changes:

- Page 1, line 2: signs and not symptoms is the more correct term to describe disease pathology in animals.
- Page 1, lines 19 and 20: vaccination status of a ferret is not relevant for the Department of Health to take measures to ensure a rabies exposure has not occurred.
- Page 2, lines 11-14: The definition of vaccination is removed since the term is no longer used in this section.
- Page 2, lines 28-31: this language is being removed because any actions taken to protect people from getting rabies are not limited by vaccination status, or if an animal is wild, stray or unwanted. The resulting language includes all animals that are capable of transmitting rabies.
- Page 3, line 2: we included possible exposures of other animals to rabies as criteria for taking actions to reduce the risk of rabies exposures to people. For example, if a family's dog is bitten by a skunk, what should be done with the dog?
- Page 3, lines 3-8: have been deleted because they are now redundant to the new language found in 23-36-03, subsection 2.
- Page 3, lines 9-15: these changes clarify that the Department of Health may take actions to protect people from rabies even if the animal is already dead.

- Page 3, lines 20-23: This language will give the Department of Health, a local public health unit or law enforcement the authority to have an animal, that may have exposed a person to rabies, examined by a veterinarian.
- Page 3, line 31: we added possible exposures of another animal to rabies as reason for requesting assistance from other agencies.
- Page 4, lines 11-13: we replaced the word vaccine with biologics to be inclusive of rabies immune globulin, which is an important part of post-exposure rabies prevention but is not technically a vaccine.
- Page 4, lines 26-27: "another animal" is included to clarify the Department of Health's limits of liability. This language would allow the exposure or possible exposure of another animal to rabies to be a legitimate cause for action to control rabies.

This concludes my testimony. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.