

Agriculture
COMMITTEE BUSINESS & INDUSTRY
EXHIBIT NO. 11
DATE 1/5/05
BILL NO. SB22

Montana Veterinary Medical Association (MVMA)
SB 22 EQUINE MASSAGE THERAPY

SB 22 proposes to legalize the unregulated diagnosis and treatment of horses by lay personnel, specifically massage therapists. The Montana Veterinary Medical Association and American Veterinary Medical Association oppose the practice of Veterinary Medicine by persons not trained and licensed to practice Veterinary Medicine, and thus oppose this bill.

The Practice of Veterinary Medicine is defined as the diagnosis, treatment- medical, surgical, dental and complimentary/ alternative- and prevention of disease in animals and animal populations in the context of a veterinarian-client-patient relationship. Another definition is "To diagnose, treat, correct, change, alleviate, or prevent animal disease, illness, pain, deformity, defect, injury, or other physical, dental, or mental conditions by any method or mode."

All Veterinary Medicine should be held to the same standards. Claims of safety and efficacy should be proven by the scientific method. For the good of public protection, high standards of professionalism and expertise must be uniformly applied to Veterinary Medicine, and there must remain the authority to discipline an individual that causes harm to an animal as a result of practicing Veterinary Medicine, to include Complimentary and Alternative Veterinary Medicine. A lay person that completes a 2-28 week course of study in human massage therapy techniques is simply unqualified to diagnose and treat equine locomotor ailments. While no harm may come of massage techniques, there is a real potential for delayed Veterinary evaluation, diagnosis, and treatment of true underlying causes of lameness such as hoof wall abscesses or infected joints, leading to great expense to the owner and potential loss of the animal.

There are many successful examples of applying products and technologies developed by Veterinarians to treat humans, including vaccines, antibiotics, renal dialysis, and coronary artery stents. This does not give Veterinarians the legal right to treat humans. Similarly, there are many human treatments and surgical techniques that have been applied to animals and are currently provided by Veterinarians, including vertebral column stabilization surgery, many pharmaceutical products, and such alternative and complimentary practices as aromatherapy, acupuncture, chiropractic and massage therapy. This does not

imply the legal right of human health care personnel to directly treat animals. In fact, when applied to animals, all of these treatment modalities represent the practice of Veterinary Medicine, and should remain subject to Title 37, Chapter 18 MCA.

The intent of SB 22 is to allow the unregulated, unsupervised diagnosis and treatment of animals by lay personnel for the purpose of generating income. This flies in the face of over a hundred years of progressive professional Veterinary care of our animals.

If a massage therapist has the desire to treat animals, he or she should be encouraged to attain an undergraduate degree and attend Veterinary school, or to complete training in Veterinary Technology to work with Veterinarians in treating animals. Alternatively, there is nothing that prohibits interested massage therapists from establishing relationships with Veterinarians in exploring, developing, and applying massage therapy techniques for select equine patients under the direction of that Veterinarian.

Animal health is everyone's business and concern. This bill does not promote or enhance what is best for Montanans who look to licensed Veterinarians to ensure the health of their livestock and pets. For this reason we firmly oppose SB 22 and ask this committee to give this bill a "Do Not Pass Recommendation".

MARC E. MATTIX
DVM, MSS, Dipl., ACVP
President, MVMA