

VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND CONSUMER SERVICES

Report from the Work Group Studying the Proposal of a State License and Other Regulatory Requirements for Animal Boarding Establishments

Charles Green
Commissioner of Agriculture and Consumer Services

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Author

Charles Green, Commissioner of Agriculture and Consumer Services

Legislative Mandate

Chapters 613 and 660 of the 2025 Virginia Acts of Assembly

Executive Summary

The Virginia Comprehensive Animal Care Law (Va. Code § 3.2-6500 et seq) (Law), in relevant part, establishes the requirements and authorities pertaining to public and private animal shelters; boarding establishments, which are those places or establishments other than public or private animal shelters where companion animals not owned by the proprietor are cared for in exchange for a fee, and pet shops in the Commonwealth. The Law authorizes the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS) to inspect all county or city public animal shelters and all private animal shelters and register and inspect all pet shops that sell dogs and cats. The Law also authorizes animal control officers to inspect boarding establishments upon receipt of a complaint.

Chapters 613 and 660 of the 2025 Acts of Assembly (HB 2313 and SB 1051, respectively) direct VDACS, in consultation with the State Veterinarian, to "convene a work group composed of relevant stakeholders to consider whether to propose a state license and other regulatory requirements for animal boarding establishments similar to the current licensing requirements for public and private animal shelters". The work group is required to submit its report to the Chairmen of the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Natural Resources and the House Committee on Agriculture, Chesapeake and Natural Resources by December 1, 2026 (Appendix A).

VDACS, in consultation with the State Veterinarian, convened a work group composed of relevant stakeholders on September 11, 2025, and April 16, 2026. The work group considered potential state licensure and other regulatory requirements for boarding establishments and reached several points of consensus, including that increased oversight of boarding establishments would be beneficial to the Commonwealth, that the Commonwealth should provide minimum recommended standards (i.e., a model ordinance) to ensure consistency among all localities, and that the Commonwealth should allow for local animal control officer inspections of boarding establishments at least once annually.

Work Group Participants

The work group was composed of the following relevant stakeholders:

Dr. Carolynn Bissett, Program Manager, Office of Veterinary Services, Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS)
Dr. Charles Broaddus, Director, Division of Animal and Food Industry Services, VDACS
Dr. Lane Songer, Veterinary Supervisor for Animal Care, VDACS
Anthony Rankin, Chief Operating Officer, Animal Welfare League of Alexandria; Virginia Alliance for Animal Shelters
Helen Clemens, Assistant City Attorney, City of Alexandria
Dr. Wendy Ginsberg, Legislative Director, City of Alexandria
Nancy Fisk, Virginia Federation of Dog Clubs and Breeders
Charles S. "Charley" Hall, American Kennel Club
Thomas Ingle, Chief Field Services Officer, Department of Animal Services Fairfax County
Reasa Currier, Director, Department of Animal Services Fairfax County, Virginia Federation of Humane Societies
Michael Hughes, Holiday Barn Pet Resorts, Richmond, Virginia
Arthur Prediger, Dogtopia
Tom Payne, Dogtopia
Sami Engle Price, Pender Pet Retreat, International Boarding and Pet Services Association
Ruth Faulkner, Pender Pet Retreat
Marcella Smith, Happy Hounds Doggie Day Care
Cheryl Crowe, Humane World for Animals
Jennifer Toussaint, Chief of Animal Control, Animal Welfare League of Arlington, Virginia Animal Control Association
Olivia Ryan, Paws Awhile Pet Hotel
Mother Eirene, Paws Awhile Pet Hotel
Mother Raphaela, Paws Awhile Pet Hotel

Report Of Meetings

Dr. Bissett opened both work group meetings by welcoming the work group members and inviting the members to introduce themselves.

After introductions and at both meetings, Dr. Bissett reviewed Chapters 613 and 660 of the 2025 Acts of Assembly (HB 2313 and SB 1051, respectively) and provided the work group with an overview of current laws and regulations for animal shelters, boarding establishments, and pet shops in Virginia:

1. The Law does not require state licensure of animal shelters, boarding establishments, or pet shops.
2. The Law requires pet shop establishments to register annually with VDACS and pay a $250 registration fee (§ 3.2-6501.1 of the Law).
3. The Law requires that VDACS conduct inspections of public and private animal shelters and pet shops that sell dogs and cats annually or more often as needed. Currently, two VDACS Animal Care Inspectors who are Licensed Veterinary Technicians (as required by § 3.2-5901.1 of the Law) conduct inspections.

4. The Law authorizes local animal control officers to inspect boarding establishments upon receipt of a complaint (§ 3.2-6564 of the Law).

A citizen from Chesterfield County, Marcy Blume, submitted letters of concern via email to Dr. Bissett (Appendix B), who shared them with the work group. Anthony Rankin was unable to attend the April 16, 2026, meeting, but an April 14, 2026, Letter of Position written by Chief Rankin was shared with the work group (Appendix C).

At both meetings, a roundtable discussion followed regarding potential state licensure and other regulatory requirements for boarding establishments, including inspection requirements similar to those for public and private animal shelters and pet shops. There was extensive discussion about the definition of a boarding establishment; some group members expressed the need for a clearer definition of a boarding establishment (e.g., specifics regarding the size of the boarding establishment or what quantity of animals would qualify as a boarding establishment, etc.). § 3.2-6500 of the Law (Appendix D) currently defines a boarding establishment as:

> A place or establishment other than a public or private animal shelter where companion animals not owned by the proprietor are sheltered, fed, and watered in exchange for a fee. "Boarding establishment" shall not include any private residential dwelling that shelters, feeds, and waters fewer than five companion animals not owned by the proprietor.

Some group members expressed concern that, according to the current definition, a person being paid to care for another person's six dogs while the dogs' owner is on vacation could have their residence considered a boarding establishment. Work group members also discussed that there may be differing rules or regulations for corporate versus private establishments, including home pet sitting. The work group did not find consensus on a new definition.

Both work group meetings included significant discussion on the fiscal impact of boarding establishment licensure and regulation. If VDACS were required to inspect all boarding establishments, funding for additional inspectors and increased administrative costs would likely be necessary. Some group members expressed concern about the potential fiscal impact on small businesses (e.g., licensing fees; costs for education regarding licensing and regulation; costs that could be incurred to rebuild, remodel, or retrofit an establishment in order to comply with regulatory requirements; etc.).

At both meetings, general group discussions included a majority opinion that boarding establishments should be registered and/or licensed. Further discussion contemplated whether the oversight and regulation of boarding establishments should fall under state or local authority. Work group members expressed support for the state being responsible for the licensing and/or registration of boarding establishments, while the inspection of such establishments would be the responsibility of local animal control officers.

The work group also discussed other potential requirements for boarding establishments, such as employee-to-pet ratios, biosecurity measures to prevent transmission of disease or illness, cleaning and disinfection protocols, and overnight staff presence at boarding establishments.

Work Group Points of Consensus
In summary, the work group meetings resulted in the following main points of consensus:

- Work group members discussed the distinction between licensing and registration and reached consensus in support of establishing a state registration requirement for boarding establishments. The work group recommends that the authority to conduct inspections of boarding facilities remain with localities and that inspections continue to be completed by local animal control officers. Registrations would allow localities to identify facilities in their jurisdiction. The work group recognized that establishing a registration process would have a fiscal impact on the Commonwealth and did not provide recommendations on how to support the cost of administering registrations.

- The work group recommends that VDACS establish streamlined and minimal animal health and care guidelines or standards for boarding establishments to ensure consistency among localities. These guidelines could be in the form of a guidance document.

- The work group recommends that the General Assembly amend the Law to allow local animal control officers to inspect boarding establishments at least once annually. Currently, § 3.2-6564 of the Law allows for animal control officers to enter boarding establishments only to investigate a complaint. The work group recognized that increasing inspection frequency could have a fiscal impact on localities and did not provide recommendations on how to support these costs.

Appendix A – Chapter 613 of the 2025 Virginia Acts of Assembly (HB 2313/SB 1051)

VIRGINIA ACTS OF ASSEMBLY - 2025 RECONVENED SESSION

CHAPTER 613

A BILL to direct the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services to convene a work group to consider whether to propose a state license and other regulatory requirements for animal boarding establishments; report.

[S 1051]

Approved April 2, 2025

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:

1. *§ 1. That the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, in consultation with the State Veterinarian employed pursuant to § 3.2-5901 of the Code of Virginia, shall convene a work group composed of relevant stakeholders to consider whether to propose a state license and other regulatory requirements for animal boarding establishments similar to the current licensing requirements for public and private animal shelters. The work group shall submit its report to the Chairmen of the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Natural Resources and the House Committee on Agriculture, Chesapeake and Natural Resources by December 1, 2026.*

VIRGINIA ACTS OF ASSEMBLY - 2025 RECONVENED SESSION

CHAPTER 660

An Act to direct the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services to convene a work group to consider whether to propose a state license and other regulatory requirements for animal boarding establishments; report.

[H 2313]

Approved April 2, 2025

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:

1. *§ 1. That the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, in consultation with the State Veterinarian employed pursuant to § 3.2-5901 of the Code of Virginia, shall convene a work group composed of relevant stakeholders to consider whether to propose a state license and other regulatory requirements for animal boarding establishments similar to the current licensing requirements for public or private animal shelters. The work group shall submit its report to the Chairmen of the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Natural Resources and the House Committee on Agriculture, Chesapeake and Natural Resources by December 1, 2026.*

Appendix B – March 10, 2026 Letter of Concern from Chesterfield County Constituent

"Dear Delegate Ware / Senator Hashmi,

I am a resident of Chesterfield County and a constituent in your district, and I am writing as a concerned citizen and devoted animal lover to respectfully ask that the Virginia legislature consider establishing clearer safety standards for dog daycare and boarding facilities across our state.

Like many families today, I consider my dog to be a beloved member of my family. Dogs provide companionship, emotional support, and joy to countless Virginians. Because of this, many of us rely on dog daycare and boarding facilities when we travel or when we must be away from home during the day.

Recently, I began researching how these facilities operate, and I was surprised to learn that there appear to be very few clear statewide standards governing staffing levels, supervision, and safety practices in these environments.

For example, in many daycare settings, one staff member may be responsible for supervising very large groups of dogs - sometimes twenty or more at a time. In addition, some boarding facilities reportedly have no staff physically present overnight.

These practices raise serious concerns for many pet owners.

Dogs are living, vulnerable beings that rely entirely on the people responsible for their care. In many ways, dogs in daycare or boarding situations are similar to children at a camp or childcare facility. Most people would never expect children to be left unattended overnight in a camp or daycare setting, and many pet owners feel similarly about animals entrusted to boarding facilities.

Medical emergencies can happen at any time. A dog could have a seizure, experience breathing distress, choke, suffer a sudden illness, or become injured. In group daycare environments, dogs may also become overwhelmed, stressed, or involved in fights if supervision is insufficient.

In situations like these, minutes can make the difference between life and death.

I respectfully ask that the Virginia General Assembly consider exploring reasonable safety standards that could help ensure the welfare of dogs placed in these facilities. Possible measures might include:

- Establishing appropriate staff-to-dog ratios during daycare playgroups
- Requiring trained staff supervision whenever dogs are interacting in group settings
- Requiring at least one qualified staff member on site overnight in boarding facilities
- Providing guidelines for safely grouping dogs by size, temperament, and activity level
- Requiring basic training in canine behavior and emergency response for staff

The goal of such standards would not be to burden responsible businesses, but rather to ensure a consistent baseline of safety and care across the industry.

As pet ownership continues to grow in Virginia, more families rely on these services. Many people love their dogs as deeply as members of their own family, and they want to know that their animals will be safe, supervised, and cared for responsibly when they must leave them in the hands of others.

I would welcome the opportunity to speak further or provide input if this issue is ever reviewed by a committee or work group.

Thank you for your time and for your service to the people of Virginia. I hope you will consider looking into this issue and exploring whether clearer guidelines or protections may be appropriate.

Respectfully,

Marcy Blume
Chesterfield County, Virginia"

Appendix C – Letter of Position to Boarding Establishment Work Group

April 14, 2026

To the Members of the Legislative Body:
On behalf of the Animal Welfare League of Alexandria (AWLA) and as a representative of the Virginia Alliance of Animal Shelters, I am writing to formally express our strong support for legislation that would grant localities the authority to create and enforce their own ordinances regarding the registration and inspection of animal boarding establishments.
Currently, Virginia's status as a Dillon Rule state limits the ability of municipalities to proactively oversee these businesses. Under existing laws, local animal services often only have the authority to inspect facilities after a complaint has been filed or a tragedy has occurred. We believe that transitioning this oversight to local jurisdictions is the most effective way to ensure the safety and well-being of animals for the following reasons:

● **Responsive Oversight**: Local authorities are best positioned to respond immediately to community concerns and conduct unannounced, routine inspections that ensure consistent compliance with care standards
● **Tailored Standards**: Municipalities can better understand the specific needs and density of their jurisdictions, allowing for ordinances that address local safety and sanitation requirements more effectively than broad statewide mandates.
● **Accountability and Prevention**: Empowering local animal control agencies to manage boarding standards allows for a higher level of professional care and can prevent neglect before it impacts the lives of pets in our community.

The AWLA has seen firsthand how gaps in current oversight can lead to suboptimal conditions for boarded pets. By granting local governments the power to regulate these establishments, you are providing us with the essential tools needed to protect the animals and citizens we serve.
We urge you to support this measure to strengthen local authority and promote a higher standard of animal welfare across the Commonwealth.

Sincerely,
Anthony Rankin
Chief Operating Officer / Chief of Animal Services
Animal Welfare League of Alexandria

Appendix D – Relevant Code Sections

§ 3.2-6500. Definitions

"Adequate care" or "care" means the responsible practice of good animal husbandry, handling, production, management, confinement, feeding, watering, protection, shelter, transportation, treatment, and, when necessary, euthanasia, appropriate for the age, species, condition, size and type of the animal and the provision of veterinary care when needed to prevent suffering or impairment of health.

"Boarding establishment" means a place or establishment other than a public or private animal shelter where companion animals not owned by the proprietor are sheltered, fed, and watered in exchange for a fee. "Boarding establishment" shall not include any private residential dwelling that shelters, feeds, and waters fewer than five companion animals not owned by the proprietor.

§ 3.2-6503. Care of companion animals by owner; penalty.

A. Each owner shall provide for each of his companion animals:

1. Adequate feed;
2. Adequate water;
3. Adequate shelter that is properly cleaned;
4. Adequate space in the primary enclosure for the particular type of animal depending upon its age, size, species, and weight;
5. Adequate exercise;
6. Adequate care, treatment, and transportation; and
7. Veterinary care when needed to prevent suffering or disease transmission.

The provisions of this section shall also apply to every public or private animal shelter, or other releasing agency, and every foster care provider, dealer, pet shop, exhibitor, kennel, groomer, and boarding establishment. This section shall not require that animals used as food for other animals be euthanized.

B. Violation of this section is a Class 4 misdemeanor. A second or subsequent violation of subdivision A 1, 2, 3, or 7 is a Class 2 misdemeanor and a second or subsequent violation of subdivision A 4, 5, or 6 is a Class 3 misdemeanor.

§ 3.2-6518. Boarding establishments and groomers; veterinary care requirements; consumer notification; penalty.

A. When an animal is boarded at a boarding establishment, or under the care, custody or subject to the actions of a groomer, the boarding establishment or groomer shall be responsible for providing the animal care requirements for each animal as specified in § 3.2-6503.

B. If an animal becomes ill or injured while in the custody of the boarding establishment or groomer, the boarding establishment or groomer shall provide the animal with emergency

veterinary treatment for the illness or injury. The consumer shall bear the reasonable and necessary costs of emergency veterinary treatment for any illness or injury occurring while the animal is in the custody of the boarding establishment or groomer. The boarding establishment or groomer shall pay for veterinary treatment of any injury that the animal sustains while at the establishment or under the care or custody of a groomer if the injury resulted from the establishment's or groomer's failure, whether accidental or intentional, to provide the care required by § 3.2-6503, or if the injury is a result of the actions of the boarding establishment or groomer. Boarding establishments and groomers shall not be required to bear the cost of veterinary treatment for injuries resulting from the animal's self-mutilation.

C. If an animal is seized from a boarding establishment or groomer because of the establishment's or groomer's failure to provide adequate food, water, shelter, exercise, and care as defined in § 3.2-6500 and required by § 3.2-6503 or because of any other violation of this chapter, the animal shall be returned to the rightful owner as soon as possible or, if the owner refuses to reclaim the animal, be impounded and disposition made pursuant to § 3.2-6569.

D. Violation of this section by a boarding establishment or groomer is a Class 1 misdemeanor.

§ 3.2-6519. Written notice of consumer remedies required to be supplied by boarding establishments; penalty.

A. A boarding establishment shall give the notice hereinafter set forth in writing to a consumer prior to the consumer's delivery of the animal to the boarding establishment. Such notice shall be embodied in a written document and shall state in ten-point boldfaced type the following:

NOTICE

The boarding of animals is subject to Article 4 (§ 3.2-6518 et seq.) of Chapter 65 of Title 3.2. If your animal becomes ill or injured while in the custody of the boarding establishment, the boarding establishment shall provide the animal with emergency veterinary treatment for the illness or injury.

The consumer shall bear the reasonable and necessary costs of emergency veterinary treatment for any illness or injury occurring while the animal is in the custody of the boarding establishment. The boarding establishment shall bear the expenses of veterinary treatment for any injury the animal sustains while at the boarding establishment if the injury resulted from the establishment's failure, whether accidental or intentional, to provide the care required by § 3.2-6503. Boarding establishments shall not be required to bear the cost of veterinary treatment for injuries resulting from the animal's self-mutilation.

B. In addition, the boarding establishment shall display the following notice, in ten-point boldfaced type, on a sign placed in a conspicuous location and manner at the boarding establishment's intake area:

PUBLIC NOTICE

THE BOARDING OF ANIMALS BY A BOARDING ESTABLISHMENT IS SUBJECT TO ARTICLE 4 (§ 3.2-6518 et seq.) OF CHAPTER 65 OF TITLE 3.2 OF THE CODE OF VIRGINIA. YOU HAVE SPECIFIC REMEDIES WHEN BOARDING ANIMALS IN THIS OR ANY OTHER BOARDING ESTABLISHMENT IN VIRGINIA. A COPY IS AVAILABLE IMMEDIATELY UPON REQUEST AND IS TO BE PRESENTED TO YOU AT THE TIME OF INTAKE IN THE FORM OF A WRITTEN DOCUMENT. IF YOU HAVE A COMPLAINT, YOU MAY CONTACT YOUR LOCAL LAW-ENFORCEMENT OFFICER OR THE VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND CONSUMER SERVICES, RICHMOND, VIRGINIA.

C. Failure to display or provide the consumer with the written notice as required by this section is a Class 3 misdemeanor.

D. Any violation of this section shall also constitute a prohibited practice under § 59.1-200 and shall be subject to the enforcement provisions of the Virginia Consumer Protection Act (§ 59.1-196 et seq.).

§ 3.2-6520. Procedure for animals left unclaimed with veterinarian or boarding establishment after public notice; lien; sale.

Any animal not claimed by its owner from a licensed veterinarian or boarding establishment within 14 days after a letter of notice has been sent to the owner, by the veterinarian or boarding establishment, may be sold by the veterinarian or boarding establishment. The animal may be sold at public or private sale for fair compensation to a person capable of providing care consistent with this chapter. Any expense incurred by the veterinarian or boarding establishment becomes a lien on the animal and the proceeds of the sale shall first discharge this lien. Any balance of the proceeds shall be paid to the owner. If the owner cannot be found within the next ensuing 30 days, the balance shall be paid to the Literary Fund. If no purchaser is found, the animal may be offered for adoption or euthanized.

§ 3.2-6564. Complaint of suspected violation; investigation.

A. Upon receiving a complaint of a suspected violation of this chapter, any ordinance enacted pursuant to this chapter or any law for the protection of domestic animals, any animal control officer, law-enforcement officer, or State Veterinarian's representative may, for the purpose of investigating the allegations of the complaint, enter upon, during business hours, any business premises, including any place where animals or animal records are housed or kept, of any dealer, pet shop, groomer, or boarding establishment. Upon receiving a complaint of a suspected violation of any law or ordinance regarding care or treatment of animals or disposal of dead animals, any humane investigator may, for the purpose of investigating the allegations of the complaint, enter upon, during business hours, any business premises, including any place where

animals or animal records are housed or kept, of any dealer, pet shop, groomer, or boarding establishment.

Upon obtaining a warrant as provided for in § 3.2-6568, the law-enforcement officer, animal control officer, State Veterinarian's representative, or humane investigator may enter upon any other premises where the animal or animals described in the complaint are housed or kept. Attorneys for the Commonwealth and law-enforcement officials shall provide such assistance as may be required in the conduct of such investigations.

B. If the investigation discloses that a violation of § 3.2-6503 has occurred, the investigating official shall notify the owner or custodian of the complaint and of what action is necessary to comply with this chapter.