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[HTTPS://WWW.DENVERPOST.COM/2024/06/12/PET-CARE-VETERINARIAN-MASTERS-TELEHEALTH-VIDEO-APPOINTMENTS-BALLOT-QUESTIONS/](https://www.denverpost.com/2024/06/12/pet-care-veterinarian-masters-telehealth-video-appointments-ballot-questions/)

Opinion: As a veterinarian and a lawmaker, please don't let big businesses undermine Colorado pet care

Initiative 144 and 145 will reduce pet care in Colorado



Vet assistant Keith Cisneros, left, holds patient Tucker, a Cairn Terrier, as head vet tech Ginger Burchyett, right, looks at the dog's paper work at Belcaro Animal Hospital on November 10, 2021 in Denver, Colorado. (Photo by Helen H. Richardson/The Denver Post)

By **KAREN MCCORMICK** | Guest Commentary

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Forty years ago I swore a lifelong oath when starting my career as a veterinarian. Part of that oath affirms that I will use my scientific knowledge and skill to benefit society through the protection of animal health and welfare.

It is with that oath, and my lifetime of service to animals and people that I must now sound the alarm to all Coloradans. There are two ballot initiatives being circulated collecting signatures for the fall ballot. These initiatives are being driven by big corporate interests from outside of Colorado. They are Initiative 144 and 145 and are being misleadingly sold to voters as a way to “increase access to veterinary care.”

The General Assembly worked very hard this spring in a bipartisan, collaborative way, to develop a robust approach to how best to utilize tele-technologies like video calls in veterinary care. [That bill was signed into law by the governor](#) earlier this year, and it passed the House of Representatives unanimously. It is widely supported by veterinarians, veterinary technicians, farmers and ranchers, shelters and humane societies and animal caretakers. The bill strengthens and clarifies that veterinary telemedicine should supplement and not replace in-person care. We absolutely should use telehealth more and this law will make sure it is done right to protect pets. Initiative 144 also has to do with Veterinary Telehealth, but is a danger to pets. 144 would dismantle that well-structured law the governor just signed and eliminate the need for a doctor to ever see your animal in person. The ballot question essentially eliminates the most important tools your veterinarian has to get to the bottom of what is going on — their hands, eyes, ears, and nose. 144 would not benefit people or their animals and would create real safety concerns. It would only help corporate entities focused on profits, allowing them to push medicine to animal owners via online platforms. Animals would be the ones suffering in this situation as they would not be getting accurate care.

The second ballot initiative, 145, also funded by outside corporate interests, will allow creation of a new animal health position called a veterinary professional associate or VPA. A VPA is not licensed to practice medicine, has not gone through an accredited veterinary education program, has not passed a national exam, will not have sufficient liability protections, would not be able to prescribe medicines due to federal law, and will be under-trained through primarily an online master’s program. These VPAs would then be allowed to actually practice veterinary medicine on your pets, including surgery, diagnose diseases, interpret lab test results and prescribe a treatment plan, all without a license. Corporate interests want VPAs to practice medicine without the consumer protection safeguards that exist for licensed veterinarians.

If this sounds crazy to you then you can understand my grave concern for the animals of our state for whom we are responsible.

Skilled veterinary technicians are already more qualified than this contemplated VPA. They have comprehensive training, take a national exam and are regulated by the state. We passed another strong bipartisan bill to elevate and extend the skills of veterinary technicians [with House Bill 1047](#).

There has been over \$633,000 granted to Colorado State University by Petsmart Charities to develop a veterinary mid-level position master's degree. This degree program is not looking to be accredited by the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) who is responsible for accreditation of every single College of Veterinary Medicine in the country, including CSU's, and for every school that graduates Veterinary technicians. In order for this master's degree to work for Petsmart, who partners with Mars, Inc./ Banfield vet clinics, would need ballot initiative 145 to get on the ballot and pass.

There has been over \$255,000 contributed toward the effort to get these Initiatives on the ballot by the Issue Committee called 'All Pets Deserve Care' registered with the Secretary of State. This entity received its largest single donation of \$250,000 from Denver Dumb Friends League. The details into DDFL's financials to know where the \$250,000 came from is not publicly available.

Mars, Inc. who owns Banfield and VCA veterinary hospitals across the nation have funded studies in the past that have fed a narrative that the U.S. needs to create a new veterinary position in order to keep up with the demand for veterinary care. These studies have been disputed by many reputable veterinary economists since. But the narrative has taken off and is fueling this push to create a new veterinary worker who in reality won't be prepared to help animals.

We need more veterinarians and more veterinary technicians. Let's focus on solving that problem.

Karen McCormick is a state representative for House District 11.