

**House Health & Human Services**

**03/10/2026 Upon Adjournment**

**HB26-1229 Supporting the Human-Animal Bond**

**Typed Text of Testimony Submitted**

<b>Name, Position, Representing</b>	<b>Typed Text of Testimony</b>
Nicole Hurt  Against  themselves	<p>I am writing to oppose HB26-1229, which proposes amending the statutory definition of “social determinants of health” (SDOH) to include the human-animal bond. While relationships with companion animals can be meaningful for many people, incorporating this concept into the statutory definition of SDOH risks compromising the policy integrity of that framework. Doing so diminishes the meaningful understanding of health equity and minimizes the central role that structural inequities and systems of oppression play in shaping health outcomes across populations.</p> <p>The concept of SDOH has a specific and well-established meaning in public health. They refer to the structural conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work, and age. These are not individual lifestyle choices; they are shaped by social systems, public policy, and the distribution of power and resources. Stable housing, food security, transportation, education, economic stability, and access to health care are recognized as social determinants because they reflect societal structures and legacies of oppression that profoundly influence health outcomes across populations.</p> <p>The human-animal bond does not operate at this structural level. For people without disabilities, pet ownership is generally a personal lifestyle choice, not a systemic condition produced by social structures in the same way as housing stability or health care access. While pet ownership may offer certain health</p>

	<p>benefits, correlation with well-being is not the standard used to define SDOH. Many personal behaviors, such as exercise and recreation, can influence health but are not classified as social determinants because they are not structurally determined and do not carry the same population-level consequences.</p> <p>Equating the human-animal bond with structural determinants obscures the difference in scale and impact between these categories. SDOH shape life expectancy, disease burden, and population health disparities; the human-animal bond does not approach this level of systemic influence.</p> <p>Expanding the statutory definition risks diverting limited public health resources away from addressing foundational barriers such as housing instability, poverty, and unequal access to education and health care “ issues that disproportionately affect oppressed and marginalized communities.</p> <p>For these reasons, I urge the committee to oppose HB26-1229 and reject the proposed amendment to the definition of social determinants of health.</p>
<p>Regan Byrd Against themselves</p>	<p>I understand the intentions of this bill are positive, but I believe this bill will have a net negative impact if passed. The social determinants of health is an extremely important concept for the purposes naming the structural and interpersonal elements of a persons life that impact their health and health outcomes. It is mostly and mainly concerned with these structural elements sand community systems, things like neighborhood safety, proximity to environmental hazards like factories and waste sites, access to stable housing, access to adequate food resources, etc. Authorizing the health disparities and community grant program to direct funds to programs that support the human-animal bond runs the unacceptable risk of moving critical funding away from these much more impactful and substantive issues in health assessment, and towards an area that is more superficial, more individual than structural in nature, and less impactful</p>

	<p>overall. This bill should not be passed in order to ensure already limited funding is directed to the most important social determinants of health and in ways that will be the most impactful for the communities being served.</p>
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Colorado Association of Local Public Health Officials

Representative Lindsay Gilchrist, Chair  
Representative Sheila Lieder, Vice Chair  
House Health & Human Services Committee

Cara Bradbury  
Executive Director  
Colorado Association of Local Public Health Officials (CALPHO)  
[Director@calpho.org](mailto:Director@calpho.org)

Tuesday, March 10, 2026

RE: Opposition of HB26-1229 Supporting the Human-Animal Bond

Chair and members of the committee,

The Colorado Association of Local Public Health Officials represents Colorado's 56 local public health agencies (LPHAs). Our members work every day to improve community health, reduce disparities, and address the conditions that influence health outcomes across the state.

First, we want to acknowledge that many of us in public health recognize the meaningful role animals can play in people's lives. Pets can provide companionship, emotional support, and connection for many individuals.

At the same time, public health policy generally defines social determinants of health as population-level conditions such as economic stability, housing, transportation, education, and access to healthcare. These determinants consistently influence health outcomes across entire populations.

The research on pet ownership and health outcomes is mixed and complex. Some studies suggest benefits such as reduced loneliness or increased activity, while others show no measurable health impact or even negative associations related to stress, financial burden, allergies, injuries, or caregiving challenges. As a result, the evidence does not show a consistent population-level relationship between pet ownership and improved health outcomes.

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Because of this, our concern is less about the value of pets themselves and more about how the bill changes statutory language tied to the Health Disparities and Community Grant (HDCG) Program and potentially other sources of LPHA funding. The HDCG program was created to “address prevention, early detection, and treatment of cancer and cardiovascular and pulmonary diseases in underrepresented populations, and to positively affect social determinants of health to reduce the risk of future disease and exacerbating health disparities.” This program currently funds evidence-based efforts addressing critical drivers of health inequity for Colorado’s most marginalized communities.

Given the longstanding challenges of adequately funding prevention services and the difficult fiscal environment the state is facing, we are concerned this change could unintentionally dilute resources available for programs addressing well-established drivers of health disparities, now or in the future.

Thank you for your consideration of these concerns, which are not intended to diminish the value of the human–animal bond, but to ensure that the Health Disparities and Community Grant Program and other sources of LPHA funding remain focused on well-established and universal drivers of health disparities.

Sincerely,



Cara Bradbury

Executive Director

Colorado Association of Local Public Health Officials

Testimony from Philip Tedeschi, LCSW

Clinical Professor, University of Denver Graduate School of Social Work

Founder and Director Emeritus, Institute for Human-Animal Connection

Hearing on HB26-1229 - Supporting the Human-Animal Bond -

Prime Sponsors: Taggart, Feret

March 10, 2026

My name is Philip Tedeschi. For over two decades, I have served as a Clinical Professor at the University of Denver Graduate School of Social Work, where I am the Founder and Director Emeritus of the Institute for Human-Animal Connection (IHAC). As we approach IHAC's 20th anniversary, our institute continues to be a leading research and education organization focused on how human-animal-environment interactions affect individual and community health. I am here today to provide testimony on a matter of significant public health importance: the human-animal bond as a critical, yet often overlooked, determinant of human health.

From my perspective, informed by years of clinical practice and research, the bond between humans and animals is not merely a sentimental notion but a powerful, evidence-based health mechanism. The American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) formally recognizes this bond as "a mutually beneficial and dynamic relationship between people and animals that is influenced by behaviors that are essential to the health and wellbeing of both". This relationship has profound implications for our physical, emotional, and social health.

The research agenda of the Institute for Human-Animal Connection has been foundational in demonstrating these health impacts. Our work on "Humane Communities" explores how the presence of animals and our connection to them can serve as a capacity-building force. We have pioneered studies, including the first of its kind to test multiple physiological systems, providing evidence that the presence of a pet dog can help maintain a balanced, intermediate stress response—not simply reducing stress, but assisting individuals in maintaining healthy regulation. This physiological buffer has direct implications for preventing chronic disease.

Our research extends across the lifespan and into critical social issues. In partnership with Green Chimneys, IHAC has spent over a decade gathering data on how nature-based programs with animals improve outcomes for children with special needs . We have also documented the profound impact of service dogs on military veterans with PTSD, and we are actively investigating the inextricable links between access to veterinary care, housing stability, and human well-being . The evidence is clear: when we support the bond between people and their animals, we support the stability of families and communities.

This understanding is part of a larger, more expansive research landscape. The Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) has, through its public-private partnership, funded groundbreaking studies demonstrating that the presence of animals can physiologically ease social anxiety in children with autism spectrum disorders, providing a biological marker for improved social interaction. Furthermore, the Human Animal Bond Research Initiative (HABRI) has emerged as a central clearinghouse for this science, funding studies that document the benefits of pets for healthy aging, workplace wellness, and a range of medical conditions from cardiovascular health to mental health.

This collective body of research aligns perfectly with the One Health concept, which recognizes that optimal health outcomes cannot be achieved without acknowledging the interconnections between people, animals, and the shared environment. The One Health approach is not solely about zoonotic disease; it is also about the positive health synergies derived from these connections. A recent One Health Social Sciences working group was specifically formed to advance the understanding of the human-animal bond through this transdisciplinary lens, acknowledging its importance to both human and animal wellbeing .

The evidence demonstrates that the human-animal bond influences a wide range of health determinants:

In conclusion, legislators have a unique opportunity to recognize the human-animal bond as a true determinant of health. By supporting policies that preserve and enhance this bond—such as funding for research, support for access to veterinary care in underserved communities, and the integration of animals into therapeutic and community settings—you are making a direct investment in the public's health. The science is robust, the mechanisms are understood, and the potential for positive health outcomes is immense.

Thank you for the opportunity to present this testimony. I welcome any questions you may have.

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303-886-4424

March 10, 2026

Madam Chair and members of the committee -

I write to you today in support of HB26-1229 – Supporting the Human-Animal Bond.

As a Family Physician for 28 years and strong supporter of enhanced public health, I witness the benefits of pet ownership among my patients on a regular basis. We know that social and behavioral factors drive 80% of health. And, within the behavioral components, the ongoing bond between humans and their pets provide substantial benefits for many people. In fact, pets often provide the only positive interactions some have on a routine basis.

For many of my patients with pets, there is no medication that comes even close to providing the same benefit as their beloved pet.

In addition, many of my patients would have limited exercise and exposure to the outdoors without their pets driving those behaviors. This physical benefit adds further benefit to the psychological aspects of these relationships.

While I can understand the noted concerns some have about “diluting” the definition of social determinants of health, pet ownership is simply too important for many Coloradoans to not include in statute.

This bill does not create a new program. This bill does not mandate funding or change eligibility for current grants or programs. As a collective community here in the state of Colorado, we should recognize the social determinants for what they are and give proper credit to pets as a very important factor.

Please support HB26-1229. Thank you for the opportunity to share my views.

Michael J. Pramenko M.D  
Family Physician  
Grand Junction, Colorado