

LB596 Passes Final Reading 46-0

A bill to end state licensing and regulation of professionals offering massage services for equines, cats, and dogs has been unanimously adopted by the Nebraska Legislature.

Legislative Bill 596 was introduced by North Platte-area Sen. Mike Groene after hearing from Karen Hough (pronounced Huff), a former horse massage practitioner who was unable to work in the field after receiving a cease and desist order from the state's Department of Health and Human Services.

The Platte Institute provided written testimony in support of Legislative Bill 596.

“My customers were really angry that the State of Nebraska was telling them who they could hire to massage their horses,” [Hough told the Platte Institute](#) in December 2017.

Under current law, equine massage practitioners must either work under a veterinarian's supervision or earn an animal therapist license, which also requires a license for practicing massage therapy on people. Nebraska has one of the country's most costly and time-consuming massage therapy licensing requirements.

LB596 would end state licensing requirements or regulations on the profession. The bill has also been amended to include animal massage services for cats and dogs, in addition to equines, which includes horses, donkeys, mules, and similar animals. While an amendment to add a state registry for practitioners was adopted at first, it was removed after some senators expressed reservations about imposing criminal penalties on those who did not comply.

“Horse owners are educated about their craft and have a lot of money invested in their horses, trailers, and pickups. They're not going to take their horse to somebody if they're not confident they're going to make their horse better,” [Hough told the Platte Institute](#) in December 2017.

Since Hough's story came to light, numerous Nebraskans have expressed their interest in opening similar businesses across the state.

Dawn Hatcher, an aspiring equine massage practitioner from Columbus, Nebraska, had this statement upon the bill's passage:

"The passing of LB596 helps open a door for rural Nebraskans to start their own small businesses. It also gives horse owners a broader choice in care for their horses. For me personally, it allows me to pursue a dream of working in the equine field. The opportunity to combine my love of horses with my own business has me very excited for the future," said Hatcher.