

**Neutral Testimony on House Bill 2297
to the House Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources
by Elizabeth Chambers, Policy Intern and Flinchbaugh Fellow
Kansas Department of Agriculture
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Good afternoon, Chairman Rahjes and members of the committee. My name is Elizabeth Chambers, and I am a policy intern for the Kansas Department of Agriculture.

I appreciate the opportunity to provide neutral testimony on House Bill 2297. This bill would authorize the Animal Health Commissioner to issue permits for raccoon ownership. Ultimately this is a policy decision for the Legislature, but the agency would like to highlight some of the issues that the Legislature would need to address regarding animal and human health risks and current statutory and regulatory requirements.

Raccoons are known to carry infectious diseases that can be transmitted to humans. Both young and mature raccoons can shed viruses, bacteria and parasites that can cause infection and disease in humans when exposed. Humans are exposed to diseases when they handle raccoons. Saliva, urine, feces, bites and scratches are the most common types of exposures for humans.

Rabies is the most common disease risk from raccoons. Rabies is a virus that is spread by contact with the saliva of an animal or by being scratched or bitten by a rabid animal. There are rabies vaccinations available for use on livestock and domesticated animals such as dogs and cats. HB 2297 specifies that raccoons shall be vaccinated for rabies. However, no vaccines are currently labeled for general public use for raccoons.

The Animal Health Commissioner is responsible for ensuring the health and welfare of Kansas livestock and domestic animals. State regulations under the purview of the Kansas Department of Health and Environment restrict the possession or sale of raccoons, skunks, foxes and coyotes and prohibits keeping these mammals as pets. It is also prohibited to vaccinate said animals to prevent the spread of rabies. Kansas Administrative Regulations outline these restrictions in section 28-1-14. HB 2297 would broaden the Animal Health Commissioner's authorities beyond health and welfare of livestock and domestic animals to include raccoons, which are considered wildlife.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide neutral testimony on HB 2297 and share some of the concerns that would need to be addressed before this legislation were to move forward. I'm happy to stand for questions at the appropriate time.