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EDITOR'S NOTE

Ensuring Safe Arrivals

“Dogs do not have many advantages over people ... ”

— Milan Kundera

Growing up on an island, I can't remember a time that there was unrestricted pet travel with no oversight. This was part of the reason that, as children, we thought rabies only existed in horror films. When I moved to the States with my dog it was interesting to find out there was no required quarantine, and the immigration protocol required for my dog was actually a good deal easier than that required for myself. Fast forward nearly 2 decades and we now see overdue restrictions on animal immigration being a focus of the Healthy Dog Importation Act (HR 6921), which is aimed at ensuring dogs entering the U.S. do not pose a health risk to humans or animals. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) currently estimates the number of dog immigrations to be more than 1 million a year—and this is suggested to include many dogs for retail purposes!¹ Some of these imported dogs are apparently ending up in local shelters and rescues in an ironic effort to meet the increased demand for pet dogs.

Amid the distractions of 2020, you would be forgiven for not noticing a strong surge of veterinary body support for the Healthy Dog Importation Act, which would give the U.S. Department of Agriculture new tools and authority to monitor and safeguard the health of dogs being imported. This act would require every dog entering the U.S. to have a certificate of veterinary inspection, as well as certification that the dog has all the required vaccinations and negative test results for illnesses. The bill would also streamline federal

oversight, ensuring documentation and import permits are shared electronically between the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), the CDC, and Customs and Border Patrol, while clarifying APHIS's key enforcement authority.

Imported dogs can reintroduce diseases and parasites that were previously eliminated in the U.S. Our animal populations are likely to have limited immunity to many strains of these imported diseases, so disease progression can be fast-moving. Obviously, the fear of animal pandemics and the globalization of disease is topical today. In addition to new and lethal strains of distemper and canine influenza, multiple dogs have been imported carrying canine brucellosis and countless vector-borne diseases like leishmaniasis.

As a pet owner, I would not begrudge a slightly more rigorous approach to the assessment and certification of my dog to become a legal green card holder. As veterinarians, we should all educate ourselves on the current legal stance (see **Additional Reading**) and urge our state representatives to support the HR 6921 legislation. This is one way in which we can leverage our expertise as veterinary professionals to help make a change for the benefit of pets and people. To see more ways in which you can engage in legislative advocacy, see “Understanding Advocacy” on page 94. This is at least far less divisive than the topic of human immigration, although dogs may finally be losing one of their last advantages over humans. **TVP**

Additional Reading

- [cdc.gov/importation/bringing-an-animal-into-the-united-states/dogs.html](https://www.cdc.gov/importation/bringing-an-animal-into-the-united-states/dogs.html)
- [cqrcengage.com/akc/file/MrEOtd3RzQ0/AKC_Fact_Sheet.pdf](https://www.cqrcengage.com/akc/file/MrEOtd3RzQ0/AKC_Fact_Sheet.pdf)
- [aphis.usda.gov/aphis/ourfocus/animalwelfare/ct_awa_import_live_dogs_regulation](https://www.aphis.usda.gov/aphis/ourfocus/animalwelfare/ct_awa_import_live_dogs_regulation)

¹United States Department of Agriculture. Report on the Importation of Live Dogs into the United States. naiaonline.org/uploads/WhitePapers/USDA_DogImportReport6-25-2019.pdf. Accessed January 2021.