



The Ohio House Commerce and Labor Committee

Ohio Veterinary Medical Association Testimony (OVMA) offered by Dr. Mike Dyer

12/11/2019

Sub H.B. 67

Good afternoon Chairwoman Manning, Vice Chair Dean, Ranking Member Lepore-Hagan, and members of the Ohio House Commerce and Labor Committee. My name is Dr. Mike Dyer. I am a veterinarian and Chair of the Ohio Veterinary Medical Association's Legislative Committee. I appear before the committee today on behalf of the over three thousand members of the OVMA to provide testimony in support of the substitute version of House Bill 67.

First and foremost, we would like to thank the bill sponsors, Representative Brinkman, and Kelly for working with us in addressing our concerns with the as introduced version of House Bill 67. The piece of legislation you now have in front of you today is a result of many hours of hard work, multiple drafts, and some new ways of thinking. Substitute House Bill 67 will not only make a positive impact on the health and welfare of Ohio's animals but will also have a lasting effect on the profession of veterinary medicine. We also believe this language today serves as a model workforce recruitment and workforce retention tool.

Substitute House Bill 67 addresses the two main concerns OVMA expressed with the as introduced bill. First, the bill broadens the acceptable charitable services by opening it to more than just spay and neuter services. Second, should a veterinarian provide charitable services, the substitute version replaces the continuing education credits with a loan repayment program.

Substitute House Bill 67 sets up the "Veterinarian Student Debt Assistance Program." Before we get into the mechanics of the proposed new program – we want to make one thing clear. This program would not require one new state dollar. The program would be self-funded by veterinarians, would not require a raise in licensing fees, and will not upfront earmark any current licensing money to fund the program.

The Veterinarian Student Debt Assistance Program would operate as follows:

Licensed Veterinarians in Ohio who have performed charitable veterinary services in accordance with rules established by the Ohio Veterinary Medical Licensing Board would be eligible to enter into a lottery system to receive between 5,000 and 10,000 dollars to repay debt incurred during veterinary school. Awards would be at equal amounts. The recipient would enter into a contract requiring that the individual remains in Ohio as well as perform charitable veterinary services for the duration of the contract. Should the recipient break the contract, there are penalty provisions for repayment.

The Veterinarian Student Debt Assistance Program would be funded by any excess revenue the Ohio Veterinary Medical Licensing Board brings in as part of licensing fees. The Executive Director of the OVMLB would certify to the director of OBM the revenue against the appropriated amount, and the difference would be deposited in the new fund.

Looking at the last biennium as an example. Over SFY 2018 and 2019, the OVMLB was appropriated in total \$895,738 dollars according to the Legislative Service Commission's Budget in Detail document. According to Ohio Office of Budget and Management's interactive budget located on their website, the OVMLB had \$1,184,544.16 in revenue. In total, over the two years, the OVMLB generated \$288,806.16 in excess funds. Based on our calculations, if the Veterinarian Student Debt Assistance Program were in existence, the OVMLB could have awarded 57 licensed veterinarians \$5,000 each or 28 licensed veterinarians \$10,000 each. Thus, making a significant impact on the amount of debt these individuals have.

Every day in Ohio and across the United States, veterinarians are providing a myriad of charitable services. For example, veterinarians set up "Mash-style" clinics to provide low to no-cost services for underserved populations, provide low to no-cost spay and neuter clinics, assist in natural disaster response, humane cases, treat the animals of the elderly and homeless populations, etc. I could go on all afternoon listing the number of charitable services that veterinarians perform every day. I have with me some specific examples of charitable veterinary services we believe illustrate some of the types of charitable veterinary services that should be allowed under this bill. We do these not for recognition or notoriety rather to make an impact on the welfare of the animals as well as our communities.

When the sponsors of the legislation approached us to find a way to support the bill. OVMA wanted to broaden the impact of the bill. We wanted to make sure every veterinarian in Ohio would have the ability to be eligible for the program as well as make sure we address a larger issue plaguing veterinary medicine.

Veterinary school debt is a major issue not only here in Ohio but across the country. According to the American Veterinary Medical Association, the mean educational debt of those who graduated with debt, was \$184,299. Conversely the average debt a graduate, who has a debt larger than zero from The Ohio State University College of Veterinary Medicine over the last four years is between \$211,000 and \$222,000. The reason we are highlighting graduates from OSU is – OSU graduates make up a little less than 80% of Ohio veterinarians.

Being tasked with such a large amount of debt coupled with the starting salary being in the \$80,000 range undoubtedly plays a factor in what job an individual takes, where they live, and how much time they can volunteer post-graduation. I can speak for myself. My clinic is in Proctorville, Ohio. A quaint town on the board of West Virginia and Ohio. The population is a little more than five times the total membership of the Ohio House of Representatives. I currently employ five veterinarians and have a total staff of over 20 people. Veterinary school debt plays a huge role in my ability to recruit individuals to work at my clinic. While this is an issue in rural Ohio, this also plays a factor in every single city in Ohio. Even if a recent graduate wanted to enter shelter medicine, work in an impoverished area, or someone who is looking to expand their clinic and hire another veterinarian or employee, every single situation is impacted by the debt incurred during school. By not limiting the population who would be eligible for participation in this program allows there to be a lasting impact that does not have geographic or

programmatic boundaries – allowing this program to have a uniquely positive impact on every community in Ohio.

I will leave you with this. When tasked with finding a workable path forward on this bill, we wanted to find a modern solution. We will be the first to admit, the debt a veterinarian accrues during school is a problem our profession needs to tackle. This language is our attempt in address this problem. All that we are asking for is access to the excess money that we as veterinarians and our colleagues pay to be licensed to go toward mitigating veterinary school debt. While this will not erase all the debt, each individual veterinarian has, this program has the potential to make a lasting impact on every veterinarian in the state of Ohio as well as our communities.

Again, we thank you for your time and consideration of this proposal. We stand ready to answer any questions.