

Testimony of Rustin M. Moore, DVM, PhD, Diplomate ACVS
Dean of the College of Veterinary Medicine at The Ohio State University
Senate Finance Higher Education Subcommittee

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Substitute House Bill 49

Chairman Gardner, Vice Chair Williams, and members of the Senate Finance Higher Education Subcommittee, thank you for allowing me to testify today on House Bill 49, the state's biennial budget legislation. As the Dean of The Ohio State University's College of Veterinary Medicine, it is my privilege to tell you a bit about our college today, and ask for your support of our efforts.

There are only 30 veterinary colleges in the United States, and we are the only one in Ohio. The college was established more than 132 years ago, and we are the largest, with the most alumni, and **consistently ranked in the top five nationally.**

We receive state support through the Medical 1 set-aside with the State Share of Instruction (SSI). We are pleased that the House has maintained level funding for this set-aside and ask the Senate to do the same.

Our college also receives funding through a separate line-item, called OSU Clinic Support (line 235572), which supports clinical experiences for students within the College of Veterinary Medicine and the College of Dentistry at OSU. Unfortunately, this line item was reduced by 10 percent in the House-passed bill and, for state fiscal year 2019, was combined with multiple line items that support our state's medical colleges into one funding stream to be distributed by the Chancellor of Higher Education. Collapsed into this line item are all of the state colleges of medicine clinical teaching line items; the OSU clinical support line item; and the line items supporting family practice, primary care residencies, geriatric medicine, and long term care research.

I request that funding for OSU Clinical Support be restored. However, even more importantly, this line item should remain as its own dedicated funding stream and should not be combined with line items dedicated to training the medical workforce.

Funding for this line currently is \$766,533. Of this amount, \$355,480 typically is allocated to Veterinary Medicine and \$411,053 to Dentistry. H.B. 49 would reduce this line item to \$689,990 in SFY 2018. While this may not seem like a substantial cut to our program, **our clinical rotations are critically important in educating our students since our students must graduate ready to practice.** There is no additional education required prior to obtaining a license to practice, unlike medical school graduates, who are required to complete a residency program in order to be licensed.

Funding dedicated to training dentists and veterinarians should not have to compete against medical priorities and the state's seven public and private medical colleges. While the Chancellor of Higher Education would consult with current recipients of the funds on distribution of the new line item for fiscal year 2019, it would be difficult for veterinary and dental education to maintain our needed funding.

Our students learn the most advanced veterinary medical care as more than 40,000 animals are served in our Veterinary Medical Center Hospitals each year, including our Hummel & Trueman Hospital for Companion Animals, Hospital for Farm Animals, and the Galbreath Equine Center, and thousands more are provided care across 17 counties by our Large Animal Ambulatory Services in Marysville.

In addition to working in our hospitals, our students have preceptorships with area veterinarians and participate in our Veterinary Outreach Program. This program provides veterinary care to the pets of Franklin County's homeless and homebound elderly populations in partnership with local non-profit organizations. For these vulnerable people in difficult situations, their pets are often their only lifeline. We also collaborate with Capital Area Humane Society and source shelters in rural communities to provide spay/neuter and other veterinary care to animals that then become adoptable pets.

We have trained 85 percent of Ohio's more than 3,500 veterinarians. Beyond the typical small animal practitioners, our graduates can be found in large animal practice, food safety, academia, public health and research settings, and other disciplines working to serve and promote the health and wellness of people and animals across Ohio and globally.

Veterinary medicine contributes more than \$6 billion per year to the state's economy and plays a pivotal role in protecting and enhancing the state's nearly \$110 billion agricultural industry. Ohio State veterinarians ensure a healthy, safe and plentiful food supply through research, investigation, extension and outreach to dairy, beef, swine, poultry, and other animal agriculture producers across Ohio.

Our veterinarians and researchers are working on the prevention, detection, containment and treatment of infectious diseases of livestock and poultry, as well as companion animals and wildlife.

Our veterinarians play a vital role in the health and well-being of people through preventing the spread of zoonotic diseases (those transmitted from animals and people), ensuring a safe food supply, conducting innovative comparative biomedical research, and through zootherapy, the positive health benefits that occur when people interact with animals.

While we appreciate that SSI support is maintained, our college is challenged by an already low level of state funding. When comparing state support on a per student basis among all U.S. colleges of veterinary medicine, our college ranks near the bottom and is at the bottom of the top 10 colleges. Specifically, the amount of state support for veterinary

medical education on a per student basis among the top 10 peer colleges of veterinary medicine ranges from \$19,450 to \$56,000, with the average being \$44,245. **The amount of subsidy provided to our college (\$19,450) is less than half of the average of the top 10 and is near the bottom of all 30 colleges.**

If our state clinic support is not maintained, we will need to explore other avenues to financially support our clinical experiences. However, these options are limited as **the average veterinary student graduates from OSU's College of Veterinary medicine with more than \$194,000 in debt (associated with their veterinary education), compared with \$155,000 nationally.** This means on average **our veterinary students graduate with more than 25% greater debt** compared to the average of graduates of all US colleges of veterinary medicine. Despite committing to minimal tuition increases (an average of ~2.3% increase per year over last several years), the tuition in our veterinary college is higher than almost every other veterinary college in the US. The average starting salary among all new graduate veterinarians in the US is the lowest of all health care professionals at \$75,477.

The OSU College of Veterinary Medicine already has taken proactive steps in the last several years to limit veterinary medical student tuition increases, implemented cost-cutting measures, enhanced operational efficiencies, and identified new revenue streams. Even with these proactive and necessary measures, the college remains highly vulnerable as it relates to maintaining programmatic excellence and socioeconomic impact because of our comparatively and substantially low state funding.

We realize the significant fiscal pressures of the state budget and look forward to continuing to work with the General Assembly on future funding needs. Enhanced state funding is needed to ensure we can recruit and retain the best and brightest faculty; recruit the best students, for which affordability and accessibility are often key issues; maintain our ability to prevent or contain an infectious disease outbreak that could decimate the poultry, swine or other animal agricultural industries; and to protect and improve public health. Further, state support would need to be increased substantively in order to narrow the current sizeable gap between us and our top 10 peer colleges, and bring us closer to the average amount of funding. This is essential to prepare the next generation of veterinarians to enhance animal health in Ohio, boost our state's economy, protect human health, and to reach an investment level required for our college to maintain sustained excellence and impact.

I invite each of you for a personal behind-the-scenes tour of the College and our Veterinary Medical Center hospitals. You will see firsthand the commitment and excellence of our animal care now and for the future, and to learn about the impact we have on the health and well-being of animals and people and the benefits we have on the state.

Thank you for your consideration of these concerns and I would be pleased to respond to any questions you may have.

