



THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF VETERINARY MEDICINE

INVITED TESTIMONY TO THE OHIO SENATE AGRICULTURE COMMITTEE

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Chairman Schaffer, Vice Chair Koehler, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Senate Agriculture Committee, thank you for inviting me to provide testimony today regarding the state's biennial operating budget.

We are very appreciative of your support for the Ohio State College of Veterinary Medicine and your commitment to help address the state's veterinary shortage. We are grateful to the Governor DeWine and the House of Representatives for their investment in the Protect OHIO initiative that is aimed at educating more Ohio veterinarians and addressing this shortage across the state. I am also grateful for Ohio State President Ted Carter and Provost Ravi Bellamkonda and other university leaders who have made the College of Veterinary Medicine and our Protect OHIO initiative a priority. They, like many of you, hear regularly of the challenges of animal owners in obtaining veterinary medical services, especially in rural areas, and they, as you, are aware of the continual threat of animal disease outbreaks in our state.

As the Dean of The Ohio State University's College of Veterinary Medicine, I'd like to share with you the many challenges and risks facing animals, people and agriculture in our great state of Ohio, and it is my privilege to inform you how Ohio's only college of veterinary medicine can address those challenges. Through my testimony and responding to your questions, I hope to gain and solidify your trust and support of our efforts to truly impact and protect Ohio's animals, people and agriculture.

Budget Request Overview

The College of Veterinary Medicine is requesting the additional \$15 million per year over the FY 2026-2027 biennium that was included in Governor DeWine's as introduced executive budget. The funding for this statewide initiative was included in the Ohio State Veterinary College of Medicine's line item, which also includes an existing \$5 million each year to support the college. The House version of HB 96 reduced the overall funding from \$20 million to \$15 million each year of the biennium. We understand that difficult fiscal decisions have to be made throughout the budget deliberations, but would request that the Senate restore this funding to the Executive Budget levels.

We recognize this is a significant increase from our current funding, and I'd like to share with you today why this level of funding is necessary and how the college will use the additional resources. Among the

top U.S. veterinary colleges, Ohio State ranks in the top 5 overall yet receives the least state funding when compared to top-ranked benchmark peer colleges, with an annual allocation of only \$23,600 per student compared to the national median of \$44,200 per student. Without additional state support, we cannot meet the growing demand for veterinarians, particularly in rural areas where shortages are most severe. In addition, the college cannot adequately protect Ohio's agricultural industry against potential severe disease threats such as highly pathogenic avian influenza, African swine fever and other infectious diseases.

The proposed investment will address these issues with a new initiative designed to strengthen Ohio's veterinary workforce, protect public health, and advance the agricultural economy through three interdependent pillars. Using a One-Health approach—the concept that animal, human, and environmental health are inextricably linked—the college will launch Protect One Health in Ohio (OHIO) to:

- **Educate more Ohio veterinarians to serve rural and large animal needs:** Increasing graduates is critical to addressing Ohio's large animal and rural veterinary shortage. This will allow us to:
 - Enroll up to 35 additional Ohio students per class year.
 - Enhance student education, mentoring and other support programs by adding additional faculty and staff.
 - Expand large animal hands-on training and rural community immersion opportunities.
- **Mentor and support large animal and rural veterinarians:** Creating long-term solutions for recruiting and retaining large animal and rural veterinarians is essential to growing the workforce to help protect animals, people, and agriculture. This work will include the following:
 - Build a pipeline of Ohio students interested in careers in large animal and rural veterinary medicine by partnering with schools and youth development programs like 4-H and FFA.
 - Promote financial incentives and scholarships to veterinarians serving rural and underserved communities to increase success.
 - Collaborate with rural communities to create incentive programs to recruit graduates and support sustainable veterinary practices.
- **Establish an Emerging Infectious Disease Center:** Protecting Ohio's agricultural industry requires dedicated, proactive disease monitoring and research. This will allow us to:
 - Expand proactive research on top-priority diseases for animal agriculture in Ohio.
 - Strengthen disease monitoring and risk assessment to detect and respond to threats early.
 - Work with Ohio producers to support best practices that reduce disease transmission risks.

More information about Protect OHIO is available on the college's website at go.osu.edu/protect-OHIO.

Why Funding Protect OHIO is Critical for our Animal and Public Health

Veterinarians play a crucial role in safeguarding Ohio's robust \$125 billion agriculture industry, the foundation of animal health and food security. In Ohio, over 80% of the veterinarians at the forefront of monitoring and stopping the spread of diseases from animals to animals and from animals to humans, were educated and trained at Ohio's College of Veterinary Medicine. They are critical to preventing the next global pandemic.

Yet the veterinary profession is experiencing a critical shortage as demand for service outpaces the influx of new practitioners. Projections indicate a shortage in Ohio of 600 to 1,000 veterinarians by 2030. Currently, 500 counties nationwide and nearly one-third (28) of Ohio's counties are designated by the USDA as underserved by veterinarians. This is especially prevalent in rural areas. Without intervention, this crisis will exacerbate challenges in both animal and human health.

This shortage, coupled with the vital need for enhanced surveillance, risk assessment and proactive research of (re)emerging infectious diseases, such as highly pathogenic avian influenza (H5N1 or bird flu), African swine fever, foot/hoof and mouth disease, and other infectious diseases heightens Ohio's vulnerability to potential outbreaks that could result in significant negative impacts to livestock, poultry, companion animals, wildlife and human health.

Another important and urgent health issue that veterinarians play a critical role in is related to tick-borne diseases. Twenty years ago, there was only one medically important tick species in Ohio and now there are five species. Collectively, they carry at least 25 infectious diseases that can infect animals and people – some of these can have devastating impacts on livestock including anaplasmosis among others.

Rural veterinarians play a critical role in disease surveillance, early detection, and consultation with state and federal agencies. The College of Veterinary Medicine is actively recruiting students from underserved counties and piloting programs with public officials to address local veterinary needs. Students from rural areas tend to return to their communities to practice. Expanding rural representation is essential to maintaining healthy animal populations, ensuring food security, and protecting community well-being.

Protect OHIO emphasizes outreach, mentorship, and pipeline development by partnering with schools, 4-H, FFA, and local officials. Of the 28 counties considered underserved, we currently have 72 veterinary students enrolled across the four-year program, however, we must do more to address this complex and multifaceted issue.

Expanding enrollment by 35 students per class, 140 students over the four-year program, requires increased faculty and staff resources and infrastructure improvements to support the additional students. The college currently has the worst student-to-faculty ratio among the top 20 colleges of veterinary medicine. By hiring additional faculty and staff, we are ensuring we can educate, mentor, and support veterinary students and expand research efforts in areas critical to Ohio. These investments are essential to maintaining high-quality education while addressing the critical needs of rural veterinary

shortages. The college is committed to maintaining affordable education by limiting tuition increases and offering scholarships, but sustainable state funding is critical to ensuring high-quality training and faculty retention.

Currently, our faculty also play a critical role in risk assessment, biosecurity, disease surveillance and monitoring for diseases like highly pathogenic avian influenza as well as helping the state to be prepared for the possibility of outbreaks like African swine fever, foot or hoof and mouth disease, and others. Our teams are working closely with livestock and poultry producers to rigorously monitor and create response strategies to protect the agriculture industry and public health.

We collaborate closely with the Ohio Department of Agriculture (ODA), the State Veterinarian's Office, the USDA, agricultural commodity groups, state and local health departments and many more in this One Health approach to animal, human, and environmental health and wellbeing. While the ODA's Animal Disease Diagnostic Laboratory specializes in diagnostics and disease response, there are very limited resources to preemptively monitor infectious diseases to predict and prevent future infectious disease outbreaks and to provide risk assessment.

The Emerging Infectious Disease Center will further boost those efforts by focusing on preemptive research, surveillance, risk assessment and education especially at the farm level to protect Ohio's agricultural economy and public health. In collaboration with the Ohio Department of Agriculture, Ohio Department of Health and other partners, the center will better prepare Ohio for potential infectious diseases emergence and ensure a coordinated response to emerging threats and protect Ohio's animals, people and agriculture.

This initiative complements—not duplicates—current efforts among statewide agencies, associations, institutions, and organizations, fostering innovation in animal disease prevention and public health for the state of Ohio.

The current outbreak of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) provides a perfect case study for why the Emerging Infectious Disease Center is so critical to protecting Ohio's agricultural industry. In 2023, Ohio produced more than 11 BILLION eggs. We are one of the largest egg farming states in the U.S. The impact of HPAI has been significant and Ohio is currently leading the nation in bird flu cases detected in 2025, hitting Mercer and Darke counties the hardest. Ohio has currently lost nearly 15 million egg laying hens, pullets, turkeys and ducks. Beyond the immediate loss of flocks, HPAI is causing economic disruptions. Poultry farmers are dealing with lost revenue, while businesses that rely on the industry, including grain suppliers, feed transporters, and processing facilities, are also feeling the impact. This is significant considering the Ohio egg and turkey industries contribute more than \$11 billion in economic impact annually.

The current outbreak of bird flu has also resulted in volatility in egg and poultry prices due to market disruption caused by the strain on the nation's egg and poultry supply. The latest monthly consumer price index showed that the average price of a dozen Grade A eggs reached \$6.23 in March.

Additionally, we know the disease has been transmitted to other species, including dairy cows. And the first human case in Ohio was recorded earlier this year. In April, *60 Minutes* aired an in-depth segment on HPAI highlighting the growing concerns following the virus's mutation from birds to cattle as well as to cats, other wild and domestic mammals, and people. The report underscored that if the virus is left unchecked, continued mutations could elevate the risk of a potential human pandemic. To combat HPAI, USDA has announced a \$1 billion comprehensive strategy. U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Brooke Rollins and Governor DeWine recently met in Darke County with Ohio farmers impacted by the ongoing bird flu outbreak.

Our faculty are at the forefront of HPAI research, surveillance, risk assessment, and education. They are monitoring not only the spread among poultry and dairy cows, but carefully watching human cases to identify mutations that could create a public health crisis and the next pandemic. It's also important to note that many of these outbreaks begin in small backyard flocks or herds, and these are the very rural areas and communities who don't have veterinarians, and thus remain vulnerable and are at risk. We need veterinarians in these areas to be doing surveillance, detection, risk assessment, and educating producers about biosecurity.

Ohio's only college of veterinary medicine and the veterinary profession are indispensable to Ohio's health and prosperity and protecting Ohio's animals, people and agriculture. Through dedicated research, education, service, and outreach we address critical health challenges, protect agricultural industries, ensure a safe and plentiful food supply, and promote public health. Continued collaboration is crucial to overcoming gaps in our animal health, public health, and food safety sectors.

I want to thank Chairman Schaffer and Vice Chair Koehler for having an amendment drafted and submitted to restore full funding in the line item to \$20 million. Likewise, I would like to express my gratitude to this committee and members of the Ohio Senate for supporting this initiative.

I would be pleased to respond to any questions you may have.

Sources for HPAI/Ohio Stats

- <https://agri.ohio.gov/divisions/animal-health/hpai/01-poultry>
- <https://www.cbsnews.com/video/bird-flu-concerns-60-minutes-video-2025-04-20/>
- <https://www.usda.gov/about-usda/news/press-releases/2025/02/26/usda-invests-1-billion-combat-avian-flu-and-reduce-egg-prices>
- https://ocj.com/2025/04/u-s-secretary-of-agriculture-visits-western-ohio-farms/?fbclid=IwY2xjawKJjSZleHRuA2FlbQlxMABicmlkETFPcIJmOXl1THFnVIVRNW5hAR6HEcdgjkPmA0_xOOp3nLj1WzzHEstclV14nS79heBxLtoDVzN71LdaDK3SHw_aem_3YY4H4fOom4jUIb7RvChpQ
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