



OHIO VETERINARY MEDICAL ASSOCIATION

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The Honorable Jerry Cirino
Chair, Ohio Senate Finance Committee
1 Capitol Square
First Floor, 127
Columbus, OH 43215

RE: Written Proponent Testimony on HB 96 – Protect One Health in Ohio

Chairman Cirino, Vice Chair Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Ohio Senate Finance Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written proponent testimony on HB 96. Specifically, to advocate for the *Protect One Health in Ohio (Protect OHIO)* initiative, a forward-thinking program led by The Ohio State University's College of Veterinary Medicine.

My name is Christopher Henney, and I am the Executive Director of the Ohio Veterinary Medical Association (OVMA). OVMA is committed to advancing the veterinary profession in Ohio and ensuring the well-being of animals and people alike. Protect OHIO tackles pressing challenges in our veterinary workforce, public health, and agricultural economy, and this program is a vital step forward for our state.

Governor DeWine's executive version of HB 96 included an appropriation of \$20 million per year over the FY 2026-2027 biennium to institute this program. Unfortunately, the House-passed version of HB 96 reduced this to \$15 million per year, and the Senate substitute bill reduced this further to \$7.5 million per year.

We are requesting that the Senate replenish the full appropriation to \$20 million per year in the FY26-27 biennium through the upcoming omnibus amendment. My testimony here will lay out several important points on why this program is critical to Ohio's future in the agriculture space.

The Growing Veterinary Shortage in Ohio

Ohio's veterinary profession is at a crossroads. Projections show that by 2030, we could face a shortage of 600 to 1,000 veterinarians. This isn't just a statistic – it's a threat to our state's \$125 billion agricultural industry, which relies heavily on veterinarians, especially in rural areas. Large-animal and mixed-practice veterinarians are critical for disease surveillance, early detection, and collaboration with state and federal agencies. Without enough of them, farmers are left to manage animal health on their own, risking productivity losses and economic downturns.

Protect OHIO offers a practical solution: train more Ohio veterinarians. By expanding the College of Veterinary Medicine's class size from 165 to 200 students and prioritizing Ohio residents, we can start addressing this shortage. But this expansion requires investment. Ohio State's veterinary program ranks third in academic excellence among the top 20 U.S. veterinary colleges, yet it receives the least state funding and struggles with a 4:1 student-to-faculty ratio—the worst among its peers. The requested \$20 million per year over the FY 2026-2027 biennium will fund new faculty, maintain educational quality, and keep tuition affordable through scholarships. Last year alone, the College awarded nearly \$4.5 million to students. This funding is an investment in Ohio's future veterinarians and the communities they'll serve.

Strengthening Rural Veterinary Care

The shortage hits hardest in rural Ohio, where access to veterinary care is already limited. These areas depend on veterinarians to keep livestock healthy, supporting both the food supply and local economies. Protect OHIO takes direct aim at this issue by recruiting students from rural communities and working with local partners to create incentives—like mentoring, tax benefits, and scholarships—to bring graduates back to practice where they're needed most.

Imagine a young student from a farming town, inspired to become a veterinarian, who returns home after training to care for the animals and families he or she grew up with. That's the kind of impact Protect OHIO can have. By building this pipeline, we're not just filling jobs – we're sustaining rural Ohio's way of life.

Preparing for Emerging Diseases

Beyond workforce needs, Protect OHIO will establish an Emerging Animal Disease Center to bolster Ohio's defenses against disease outbreaks. This center will focus on preemptive research, risk assessment, surveillance, and education—complementing the Ohio Department of Agriculture's diagnostic efforts by predicting and preventing threats before they spiral out of control.

Why does this matter? A single outbreak—like avian influenza or foot-and-mouth disease—could cost Ohio billions and devastate our agricultural sector. The center will work hand-in-hand with the Ohio Department of Agriculture, the Ohio Department of Health, and other partners to monitor trends and educate stakeholders. It's proactive, not reactive, and it's exactly what Ohio needs to protect public health and our economy.

A Unified Approach for Ohio's Future

Protect OHIO embodies the One Health philosophy, recognizing that animal, human, and environmental health are linked. It's a collaborative effort, uniting the College of Veterinary Medicine with state agencies and community partners. With this \$20 million annual investment, we will see:

- A robust veterinary workforce serving both rural and urban areas.
- Enhanced disease preparedness safeguarding our agricultural backbone.
- Continued excellence in veterinary education, keeping Ohio competitive nationally.

OVMA wholeheartedly supports Protect OHIO and urges you to approve the funding it needs to succeed. This isn't just about veterinarians—it's about healthier animals, stronger communities, and a thriving Ohio. \$20 million per year is a worthy investment with lasting returns, ensuring our state remains a leader in agriculture, public health, and veterinary medicine.

Thank you again for your consideration of this important initiative. If you have further questions, do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,



Christopher Henney, CAE