

Testimony of Dr. Eric Shaver, DVM
Ohio State College of Veterinary Medicine, Class of 1985
In Support of Restoring Line-Item Funding for Veterinary Workforce Development

Chair Cirino, Vice Chair Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and distinguished members of the Senate Finance Committee, Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today.

My name is Dr. Eric Shaver, and I am a proud graduate of The Ohio State University College of Veterinary Medicine, Class of 1985. For nearly four decades, I've served as a large and mixed-animal veterinarian in rural Ohio. I live in Holmes county and serve animals and people across several counties. I've worked with farmers and families who rely on dependable veterinary care—not only to care for their animals, but to sustain their livelihoods, safeguard our food supply, and protect public health.

I speak today not just as a veterinarian, but as someone who's witnessed firsthand what happens when there are not enough of us to go around to serve Ohio's citizens and their animals.

Ohio is already experiencing a critical shortage of veterinarians, especially in rural areas and those of us who practice large and mixed-animal medicine. Unfortunately, this shortage isn't unique to our state—over 500 counties across the U.S. are federally designated as veterinarian-shortage areas. But here in Ohio, projections estimate we'll be short by 600 to 1,000 veterinarians by the early 2030s, most notably in the very communities that need us most.

Veterinarians are not just animal doctors. We are first responders in disease outbreaks, the front line in monitoring zoonotic diseases, and partners in food safety, biosecurity, and emergency preparedness. From avian influenza and swine flu to Lyme disease and other tick-borne illnesses, many of the diseases we face don't respect species boundaries—and when we fall short on veterinary capacity, it's not just animals that suffer. People do too.

That's why I fully support restoring the line-item funding to \$15 million per year for Ohio's only College of Veterinary Medicine, a modest increase from the current \$5.3 million allocation and a crucial step toward building the veterinary workforce Ohio urgently needs. While I believe Governor DeWine's original \$20 million proposal is the right target, this \$15 million figure—passed by the House—is the absolute minimum needed to have meaningful impact.

The Protect OHIO initiative from Ohio's college of veterinary medicine provides a unique, forward-thinking and actionable approach. It proposes developing a sustainable pipeline of future veterinarians by identifying, inspiring, and mentoring youth from rural and underserved communities—those who already have the heart and commitment to serve but need support to get there. This isn't just about recruitment—it's about

retention. It's about helping young people return to serve their home communities, where the need is greatest.

Public-private partnerships play a vital role in addressing the veterinary shortage in rural communities by creating pathways for local youth to pursue careers in veterinary medicine with the goal of returning home to serve. Collaborations between organizations like the Farm Bureau, OSU extension, local veterinarians, schools, and state agencies have demonstrated the need to collaborate to ensure future success and sustainability.

In my own local areas, which includes Holmes, Coshocton, Licking, and Knox counties, we understand the need and have embraced it. Such partnerships are crucial in providing mentorship, financial support, hands-on experience, and a sense of purpose rooted in community service. By investing in students who already understand the needs and values of rural life, we not only strengthen the veterinary workforce but also build a more resilient agricultural and public health infrastructure.

These efforts ensure that animals, families, and farms in underserved areas receive the care and expertise they need for generations to come. It is incumbent on the State of Ohio to invest in veterinary medicine commensurate with at least the mean or median level of funding of other states of their veterinary colleges. Currently, Ohio invests the least amount total and on a per student basis of the top 20 US colleges of veterinarians and nearly the bottom of all 33, including private schools.

This additional funding will allow Ohio State to work hand-in-hand with rural communities to provide outreach, education, and scholarships; mentorship and practical training; and to invest in the people and places that are the backbone of our state's number one industry—agriculture.

I urge you to support Senator Kyle Koehler's amendment to restore this critical funding. It's more than a university request. It's a commitment to the people of Ohio. It's an investment in our food systems, our economy, and the health and wellbeing of our animals, people, and agriculture.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.