



THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF VETERINARY MEDICINE

Testimony of Dr. Liesa Stone, DVM
Ohio State College of Veterinary Medicine, Class of 1983
In Support of Protect OHIO Funding

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

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Dr. Liesa Stone. I'm a proud 1983 graduate of The Ohio State University College of Veterinary Medicine and a lifelong resident of Cedarville in Greene County, where I currently reside on our family farm.

I have worked in several different capacities as a veterinarian, including as a private general practitioner in mixed-animal practices. For the last 13 years, I have worked at the College of Veterinary Medicine as the Assistant Dean for Institutional Advancement.

Along with my family, we raised and showed cattle, hogs, and meat goats. I also showed Quarter Horses. As past president of the Ohio Veterinary Medical Association and currently the Ohio delegate for the American Veterinary Medical Association, I am familiar with the issue of veterinary shortages in rural and other communities and the risk this poses to animal, human, and agricultural health.

To that point, veterinary shortages are real in Ohio—especially for large and mixed-animal practice in rural areas. Nearly one-third of Ohio's counties are designated veterinary shortage areas. It is estimated that by the early 2030s there will be 600-1000 to few veterinarians in Ohio. The ripple effects of this shortfall are far-reaching: from gaps in animal care and food safety to delayed detection of disease threats like avian influenza and tick-borne illnesses. It takes time to increase the number of veterinarians because of the education and training required.

That is why I ask for you to fully support restoring the veterinary medicine line-item funding to \$15 million per year—as passed by the House and proposed in Senator Koehler's amendment. This investment is vital for Ohio's only veterinary college to implement the Protect OHIO initiative, a three-pillar plan to protect the health of Ohio's people, animals, and agriculture.

First, we must educate more veterinarians to serve where they are most needed. That means expanding enrollment for in-state students from rural and underserved areas,

providing them with the training and support to return and serve their home communities.

It is not as simple as accepting more veterinary students. We do not currently receive applications from that many people from these areas of veterinary shortage and must do the requisite work to build a pipeline of youth from these areas underserved by veterinarians. We must connect with them and their families and inspire, mentor, and support their journey before and during veterinary school by engaging the local communities, including schools 4-H and FFA as county commissioners, chambers of commerce, local foundations, and other groups.

Second, we need to mentor and retain these veterinarians through strong partnerships with local stakeholders in the communities, providing them with mentoring and networking once they return to their areas as veterinarians to ensure their success and sustainability. This may involve a variety of incentives like loan repayment programs, providing and furnishing a clinic, low home mortgages rates, and other incentives to help them make a living while serving their communities.

Third, we must invest in a stronger defense against infectious disease. The recent avian influenza (bird flu) outbreak that has caused tremendous loss of chickens and turkeys and which has led to increases in egg prices is one of many examples. Bird flu has also spread to cattle, cats, and other domestic and wild mammals—and even humans in Ohio and across the country. One thing is clear: we can't wait. This is not about university funding. It's about building a resilient public health and agricultural infrastructure that reaches every corner of our state and fills the current gaps.

Establishment of an Emerging Infectious Disease Center will expand research and rapid-response capacity, working collaboratively with state and federal agencies to monitor, prevent, and contain outbreaks that threaten our livestock, our food systems, and our public health. More veterinarians in Ohio, especially in these rural and underserved and counties and communities are a critical first step to prevent disease outbreaks that spread into to other flocks and herds, and even spill over into other species, including people. Their presence in communities reduces the vulnerability and risk in these communities that can prevent major animal disease and loss, public health issues, and economic losses.

Thank you for your time and for considering this critical investment in Ohio's future. I welcome your questions.