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June 4, 2025

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

Thank you for the opportunity to submit a written testimony supporting HB96. Specifically, to provide my support for the *Protect One Health in Ohio* initiative, led by The Ohio State University's College of Veterinary Medicine. I am a proud graduate of The Ohio State University College of Veterinary Medicine Class of 1985. For the past 40 years I have been a food animal practitioner in west central Ohio. My practice works with family farm operations across Ohio and surrounding states.

I write this letter of advocacy for HB96 today as I have personally witnessed over the years the great need for food animal practitioners in Ohio. We have a shortage of veterinarians wanting to practice food animal medicine in Ohio. And for myself to find and hire a veterinarian that wants to live in rural Ohio and practice veterinary medicine has become extremely difficult. If these folks are not from the rural areas they tend to not want to live in rural Ohio, therefore making employment very difficult for us.

Ohio is already experiencing a critical shortage of veterinarians, especially in rural areas and for those of us who practice large and mixed-animal medicine. Unfortunately, this shortage is not 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. Currently it is estimated by a USDA study that 28 of Ohio's 88 counties are considered to be "underserved or have a shortage". The *Protect One Health in Ohio* initiative can help to solve that problem here in Ohio. It creates an outreach program to attract and recognize students at an earlier age to begin looking at Veterinary Medicine as a career. It can build a program to support these young professionals to return to their home areas and grow their professional careers as part of that community.

This additional funding will allow Ohio State to collaborate 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. This program centers around retention of young people to return to their home areas and serve their rural community. 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.

Secondly, let us not forget that Ohio's #1 industry is still Agriculture which is a \$128 billion dollar industry for Ohio. Our agricultural industry relies heavily on livestock operations around this great state which need veterinarians to supply animal health care, disease surveillance, community resource for zoonotic (transmission of disease between humans and animals) and collaboration with state and federal health officials. We are the "boots on the ground" for early disease detection of some emerging zoonotic diseases like High Pathogenic Avian Influenza and now the several tick-borne diseases that affect humans. The *Protect One Health in Ohio* initiative can help with this need by training more Ohio veterinarians.

The *Protect One Health in Ohio* initiative will expand the current class size at the College of Veterinary Medicine from 165 student seats to two hundred. Moreover, it will prioritize those additional seats for Ohio residents from the underserved rural areas. 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 and struggles with a 4:1 student to faculty ratio, the lowest amongst its peers. Currently, Ohio invests the least in state funding on a per student basis of the top 20 US colleges of veterinary medicine.

Beyond the workforce needs for rural veterinarians, *Protect One Health* will establish an Emerging Animal Disease Center to enhance Ohio's defenses and preparedness against disease outbreaks. The center will focus on preemptive research, risk assessment, surveillance, and education. These efforts complement the Ohio Department of Agriculture's diagnostic efforts by predicting and preventing disease threats. This is important because a disease outbreak like High Pathogenic Avian Influenza cost Ohio farmers and Ohio Agriculture millions of dollars recently. Other foreign animal diseases that may potentially enter our state could be devastating to the agricultural economy.

This is a proactive initiative to create a center to work jointly with Ohio's stakeholders for protecting public health, food safety and Ohio's economy. *Protect One Health* recognizes the One Health philosophy that animal, human and environmental health are linked. It is a collaborative effort uniting the College of Veterinary Medicine with state agencies and community partners.

In summary, this is why I completely 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 Governor DeWine's original \$20 million proposal is the right target, the current \$15 million figure—passed by the House—is the absolute minimum needed to have meaningful impact.

I urge you to strongly consider and support Senator Kyle Koehler's Amendment to restore this critical funding. It is a commitment to the people of Ohio! An investment in our food supply systems, our economy and the health and wellbeing of our animals, people, and agriculture of this great state!

Again, I Thank You for this opportunity to allow my testimony above and your time to consider my request. If you would any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Respectfully,



Bill Minton DVM.