

Testimony of Kathryn Slavick, Student

North Dakota State University

In Support of SB 2140

3.8.2021

Members of the House Education Committee:

My name is Kathryn Slavick, and I am representing NDSU Pre-Vet Club and other North Dakota pre-veterinary students planning to apply to veterinary school this year, testifying in support to SB 2140.

NDSU Pre-Vet Club's primary purpose is to prepare students for veterinary school by providing resources and opportunities to develop skills for a successful veterinarian career. The decision regarding SB 2140 will have a direct impact on pre-veterinary students across the state of North Dakota.

Many North Dakotan veterinary students rely on the Professional Student Exchange Program (PSEP) program or plan to rely on the PSEP program in order to afford their education. Considering that North Dakota does not have a veterinary school, ND veterinary students appreciate the opportunity to be supported via PSEP WITHOUT the requirement of service payback ("comeback or payback"). Therefore, I urge you to repeal the PSEP service payback provision for the reasons described below.

**The requirement of service payback is not possible for many graduates.** There is no guarantee that graduates will be able to find a veterinary position within the state of North Dakota. In addition, there is no guarantee that the graduate will be able to find a position that is appropriate to one's specialized education. Food animal medicine, companion animal medicine, specialized surgery, and research medicine are just a few examples of how diverse a veterinary education can be. Veterinary graduates face a tremendous amount of debt. The risk of not finding a job in North Dakota and needing to payback the PSEP funds will add additional financial strain during a time when graduates are looking to begin the process of paying back their debt; not accumulating more debt.

Many North Dakota students have agricultural backgrounds and plan to enter the field of food animal medicine. However, **the service payback requirement is not the solution to filling the rural veterinarian need.** There is no quick fix for that problem, as becoming an established rural veterinarian with food animal expertise face even greater challenges and costs. Requiring service payback may detour individuals from pursuing a career in food animal medicine, as some find work outside the state of North Dakota in order to reduce debt load and gain experience prior to returning to ND to serve their rural community. Focusing on the large debt to income ratio and repayment provision or service payback, many passionate and bright students may come to the realization that a veterinary career may not be financially possible for them – especially for students who have already started acquiring debt during undergraduate school.

It is also reasonable to note that many graduating veterinarians return to North Dakota (without service payback requirement), with a current return rate of 48%, according to the NDVMA. This rate is greater than other professional programs such as dentistry and optometry. There are many dedicated and passionate students planning to return to North Dakota, in order to serve their communities, whether it be rural or urban. **The service payback requirement is not needed in order for graduates to come back to North Dakota; rather it serves as a financial barrier and risk to those willing to serve communities at need.**

Thank you for the opportunity to address the committee to express support to this bill and for your continued commitment to working together to address the needs of North Dakotans. I urge you to vote YES on SB 2140.