

Dear Senator Sorvaag,

My name is Neil Dyer, a veterinarian employed by NDSU that has been involved for over twenty years in providing career counseling for undergraduate students interested in pursuing a career in veterinary medicine. I am contacting you to express my support of SB 2140 and ask for a “yes” vote on this bill.

SB 2140 repeals the “Comeback or Payback” provision added to the Professional Student Exchange program (PSEP) for veterinarians, optometrists, and dentists if recipients do not return to North Dakota and provide a service payback within 36 months of graduation. This legislation was added during the final days of the 2019 legislative session in a conference committee as an amendment and did not provide an opportunity for a committee hearing with testimony opportunity.

The thinking behind requiring a payback for individuals receiving financial assistance for their veterinary training is flawed for a number of reasons. I would like to briefly summarize those reasons for you. 1. North Dakota already subsidizes the education of medical doctors at UND and imposes no financial requirement on where those doctors practice medicine. The same provision should be in place for veterinarians. 2. North Dakota has a limited number of open positions for veterinarians returning to the state and in a few short years veterinary graduates would be forced to pay back their assistance because no place of employment would exist in the state to disallow that payback. 3. The cost of a veterinary education is already substantial. Most new veterinarians graduate with about \$150,000 of educational debt; adding a payback requirement would essentially double that amount and cripple them with monthly loan payments. 4. Since North Dakota has no in-state access to a veterinary education, and North Dakota has a substantial need for animal health professionals to help with animal agriculture and ownership, it is not unreasonable for the state to provide out-of-state assistance to those individuals who seek training in veterinary medicine. In the years before a payback clause was in place there was already nearly a 50% return rate on North Dakota students coming back to North Dakota. This is a clear illustration that North Dakota students want to come home. 5. Finally, a veterinary shortage cannot be the reason for requiring a payback clause as we do not have a shortage of veterinarians in North Dakota. However, we do have portions of the state that do not have veterinarians because the population base cannot support a viable practice. These issues are being addressed in a different way; namely that of providing financial assistance to veterinarians who are willing to locate in a less populous part of the state.

North Dakota should support the PSEP and help educate our veterinary students. PSEP is necessary for access to out-of-state veterinary schools and this support provides fairness in educational costs. **I urge you to vote “YES” on SB 2140 to repeal the comeback or service payback requirement.**

Please let me know if you have any questions regarding this issue.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Neil Dyer, DVM, MS, DACVP
Institutional Attending Veterinarian and Director of Animal Resources
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