

**North Dakota Stockmen's Association**  
**Testimony to the Senate Education Committee on SB 2140**  
**Jan. 20, 2021**

Good morning, Chairman Schaible and Senate Education Committee members. My name is Julie Ellingson and I represent the North Dakota Stockmen's Association, a 91-year-old beef cattle trade organization comprised of approximately 3,000 cattle-ranching families.

Cattle producers regard our veterinarians as critical partners in our operations, helping us maintain healthy herds, profitable businesses and, ultimately, a safe food supply. It's the reason the Stockmen's Association is a long-time supporter of the Professional Student Exchange Program, which provides specialized learning opportunities for North Dakota students at out-of-state veterinary schools. It's also why we stand in support of SB 2140, which would return the program parameters to how they had previously been.

As we just heard from our veterinary experts and our up-and-coming veterinary experts, the debt-to-income ratio for veterinarians – particularly those in food-animal practice – is substantial and rising. At two or even more times the potential earning value, the debt-load can be enough sometimes to deter otherwise talented and able students from pursuing a veterinary career. With no in-state options for veterinary training in North Dakota, our youth are already subject to non-resident tuition and, in many cases, charged double of their resident classmates.

The Professional Student Exchange Program was designed to create access for our students at these institutions of higher learning. While it is fantastic when we can recruit our students back home – and we often do – we feel it is inappropriate for the state to attach repayment provisions to the program. The uncertainty of a possible \$50,000 to \$130,000 being added to an already crushing debt load of nearly \$170,000 may very well steer our students away from this profession all together, which can directly impact livestock producers.

The livestock industry relies on dedicated, qualified animal health professionals to service our herds here in the state. Our industry, however, also benefits from the best and brightest – the kind we raise right here in North Dakota – working in veterinary specialties, research, USDA and state animal health offices and for our colleagues around the country to keep our domestic herd healthy. And that's why supporting our students through the PSEP program, no matter where life takes them, is a worthwhile investment for North Dakota and the livestock industry.