



**Testimony of Beth W. Carlson, DVM
Deputy State Veterinarian
House Bill 1004
House Appropriations Committee, Human Resources Division
Harvest Room
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Chairman Nelson and members of the House Appropriations Committee's Human Resources Division, I am Beth Carlson. I am the Deputy State Veterinarian with the Department of Agriculture and the State Board of Animal Health. Agriculture Commissioner Goehring supports and urges passage of funding for the Veterinary Loan Repayment Program, which is within HB 1004.

I have coordinated the State Board of Animal Health's involvement in the Veterinary Loan Repayment Program (VLRP) since the legislature established this program in 2007. For those of you who may not be familiar with the program, this program selects three veterinarians each year who receive up to \$80,000 in loan repayment over the course of four years in exchange for committing to provide food animal veterinary services in rural areas of the state.

Since the program began, 47 veterinarians have been selected to receive funding through this program. It has been an extremely helpful tool for rural practice owners in recruitment and retention. Of the 47 recipients, 39 either completed the required four years of service or are still working towards completing it, and 36 of them are still actively practicing in North Dakota. The program has also enabled several veterinarians to become practice owners earlier in their career than they would otherwise have been able to. In fact, nearly half of the past recipients are currently practice owners or partners.

As I'm sure you are aware, educational costs have risen significantly in recent years. When I entered my first year of veterinary school in the fall of 1997, non-resident tuition at Iowa State for veterinary students was \$17,500 per year. For the 2023-2024 school year, it will be over \$58,700.

Data from the American Veterinary Medical Association indicates that during the same time, the average starting salary for a veterinarian nationally has increased from \$55,000 to \$99,000, and the average starting salary in ND is typically \$10,000-\$20,000 less than the national average. As you can see, in the same time period that the amount of tuition has more than tripled, salaries have not even doubled.

Veterinarians remain critical to maintaining the health of the livestock and pets in this state, and they play an integral role in helping to protect public health. North Dakota's support of the veterinary profession has helped ensure that veterinarians who wish to practice in North Dakota can afford to do so, and the Veterinary Loan Repayment Program has been a key component of that support.

Chairman Nelson and committee members, for these reasons, Commissioner Goehring strongly urges you to maintain funding for the Veterinary Loan Repayment Program. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.