



North Dakota Veterinary Medical Association

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In Support of SB 2003

January 20, 2025

Chair Sorvaag and Members of the Senate Appropriations and Educational and Environmental Division,

I am Dr. Laura Beaudoin, and I am the founder and veterinarian for Comforts of Home Veterinary Care in Bismarck. As a past president of the North Dakota Veterinary Medical Association (NDVMA), I am testifying today on behalf of NDVMA to voice our support of SB 2003, specifically the funding for the Professional Student Exchange Program (PSEP).

NDVMA proudly represents over 300 veterinarians across diverse disciplines, including companion animal, exotic, livestock, food and fiber animal, and equine medicine, as well as veterinarians in research, academia, and government. For more than a century, the NDVMA has been a steadfast advocate for the veterinary profession. We are committed to ensuring that statutory changes not only protect the interests of the public, our clients, and patients, but also recognize the practical realities of veterinary practice and support the ability of veterinarians to provide safe and effective veterinary services.

PSEP funding is vital for veterinary medicine for the following reasons:

- 1) **PSEP provides a level playing field for North Dakota students to have access to veterinary medicine programs.** PSEP enables students to enroll in academic programs not available in North Dakota and receive financial aid to cover the extra cost of out-of-state tuition. Veterinary medicine is one of these programs, an occupation that is essential to North Dakota, yet not offered by any of our educational institutions.
 - 85% of North Dakota veterinary medicine students utilize PSEP; without access to PSEP veterinary medicine programs the number of ND students becoming veterinarians would be compromised. (PSEP supports up to 12 veterinary medicine students/year).
- 2) **PSEP provides vital funding to help offset some of the non-resident tuition costs.** Most of North Dakota's veterinary medicine students are charged more than twice the amount for tuition costs compared to tuition costs for residents of a respective State.
 - I.e., Kansas State University – College of Veterinary Medicine's 2024-2025 non-resident tuition costs: \$59,180/year vs. resident tuition costs \$27,546/year.
 - PSEP provides financial support to cover the difference between resident and non-resident tuition for most PSEP students.
- 3) **Eighty-two percent of veterinary medicine graduates have significant debt.**
 - In 2022, 82% of veterinary medicine new graduates had a mean debt of \$179,505 with 1 in 3 graduates having debt ranging from \$200,000 - \$400,000.
 - The mean national average debt-to-income mean (unweighted) was 1.4 for graduates seeking full-time employment.

4) Starting salaries for veterinarians are disproportionate across work sectors.

- Starting salaries for veterinarians are disproportionate across work sectors with the highest mean salary at \$120,317 (companion animal practice) to the lowest mean salary at \$69,489 (equine practice). The debt-to-income ratio continues to be of concern.
- The average compensation of 2022 graduates (full-time employment) were \$112,711.

5) The return rate to North Dakota of PSEP students continues to increase upon graduation.

- As of 10/01/2024 the return rate to ND upon graduation of veterinary medicine students is 54% (was 48% in 2020).

As a former PSEP recipient, I can provide a first-hand testament to the value of the program and how it allowed me to pursue a career in veterinary medicine. This program allows North Dakota students, like me, the opportunity to pursue a veterinary medicine career while not saddling students with the extreme costs of out-of-state tuition. Without PSEP, out-of-state veterinary education costs could prohibit North Dakota students from considering it as a viable career option.

When I was applying to veterinary colleges, I received an acceptance letter from Colorado State University for a non-resident seat, however, my parents and I crunched the numbers for tuition costs, and I turned down that offer because I knew I could not earn enough money as a large animal veterinarian in ND to make the minimum loan payments. Consequently, I was forced to either consider pursuing a different career altogether or take the slot knowing I could not afford returning to North Dakota for my career. Thankfully, my story has a happy ending. I was runner up for the PSEP funding and when a colleague turned down CSU in favor of another school, I was awarded another PSEP slot. Fortunately, I was able to return to North Dakota four years later and start my career as a mixed animal veterinarian.

Over the years, the ever-changing job market and family/lifestyle changes have significantly influenced my career path. Having PSEP support meant I could choose a job on merits other than pay, allowing me to make family and lifestyle decisions that would not have been possible if I had had an additional \$92,000 of debt. Because of these options, I can provide unique veterinary care as I offer the only in-home euthanasia service in the Bismarck-Mandan area, ensuring compassionate care for pets and their families.

PSEP is important in supporting our students in their education by providing the opportunity to study programs that are not offered at North Dakota colleges. PSEP is instrumental in keeping education costs reasonable for our students which will allow veterinarians to return to ND to practice instead of forcing them to look for more lucrative jobs around the nation just to be able to make their loan payments.

Thank you for the opportunity to address the committee and express support for PSEP funding. The NDVMA appreciates your support of PSEP in the past and strongly urges its continued funding.

Sincerely,



Dr. Laura Beaudoin
NDVMA Past President (2021)

Resources: 2023 American Veterinary Medical Association Report on the Economics of the Veterinary Profession