



North Dakota Veterinary Medical Association

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Testimony of Derine Winning, DVM Support of SB 2140 March 8, 2021

Chairman Owens and members of the House Education Committee:

I am Dr. Derine Winning, and I am here today as the public policy advisor for the North Dakota Veterinary Medical Association testifying in support of SB 2140, which repeals the PSEP comeback or payback provision. NDVMA has more than 300 member veterinarians who have an active interest in supporting the education of tomorrow's veterinarians.

NDVMA is against the comeback or payback provision for several key reasons.

One of the foremost concerns is no guarantee of a job within the state. The profession of veterinary medicine is becoming increasingly specialized. Students in veterinary school select education tracks that tailor their learning to areas of specific practice, making the appropriate job more difficult to find in our state. Most students, approximately 60 percent, will choose education tracks that focus on small animal practice. They may even choose a specialty such as cardiology, dermatology or ophthalmology. Large animal focused students may specialize in equine, dairy or swine exclusive practice. Still others will choose to tailor their career toward industry, academia, uniformed service, or other government settings. According to the American Veterinary Medical Association's 2019 State of the Profession Report, only three to five percent of veterinarians are practicing predominantly or exclusively food animal medicine. This makes it a challenge to fill these positions within our state.

While North Dakota does not provide employment opportunities for all areas of veterinary medicine, the citizens of the state still benefit from North Dakota veterinarians serving them from other states. Such veterinarians may provide consulting services for ND producers, work in out-of-state research facilities to benefit our citizens, or provide inspection and contagious (zoonotic) disease surveillance services in other states to keep our citizens and food supply safe.

In addition, many young veterinarians gain valuable experience outside the state and return to ND several years after graduation. I was one of those PSEP students. I graduated from Colorado State University with a DVM degree in 1997. For almost seven years after graduating veterinary school, I searched for an appropriate job in ND. During those years, while living in another state, I practiced fast paced small animal, exotic animal and emergency medicine. I gained useful practice, business and leadership experience that helped me come back to be a productive ND veterinarian. Not only did I become an owner of a small animal practice in Fargo, but I also started, with other local veterinarians, the first emergency animal hospital in the state. Red River Animal Emergency Hospital and Referral Center today receives referrals from veterinary clinics in other states, including the University of Minnesota Veterinary Medical Center.

In looking at the desire for ND PSEP recipients to return, we have found the return rate for PSEP veterinary students is already at 48 percent within three years of graduation. In addition, survey information gathered from recent PSEP graduates in veterinary medicine from 2014-2019 revealed 55 percent wanted to come back to ND.

Another reason PSEP students may not be able to return to the state is because not all available jobs in ND can support their student debt. The median salary for a ND veterinarian with three to four years of experience is approximately \$76,000. In comparison, the average veterinary PSEP student debt is \$163,000, over twice the amount of their starting salary. It will be extremely difficult for these veterinarians to earn a living wage. Providing for their family, purchasing necessary items such as a home, auto or even a practice can become impossible.

If they are not able to return, ND PSEP recipients will face an unmanageable debt load that will be extremely difficult to pay back. In addition to the average student debt of \$163,000, a PSEP payback for a veterinary student can add \$51,000 to \$129,000 of additional debt. The PSEP payback requirement stipulates the student must return these funds all at once. For a typical new graduate with no credit history or collateral, this can turn into a hopeless situation. They may not have an appropriate job opportunity within North Dakota, but they are not able to pay back the PSEP funding.

Finally, NDVMA realizes the state of North Dakota provides funding for other professional degrees without the requirement of returning to practice in the state. Pharmacists, medical doctors and engineers all may be educated in state with taxpayer dollars but do not have the requirement to stay within the state to practice for specified periods of time. It has been argued North Dakota does not provide funding for other individuals seeking advanced degrees not available in state. But how many of those advanced degrees come back to North Dakota? With veterinary PSEP students, ND has a real chance, as almost 50 percent do come back of their own free will. ND veterinary PSEP students are a good investment without the comeback or payback provision.

SB 2140 offers our veterinary students a real chance at success. Thank you for the opportunity to address the committee and for your continued commitment to working together to address the needs of young North Dakotans. I ask for your support of SB 2140, please vote YES on SB 2140.