

Testimony of Victoria Laven, Veterinary Student
Professional Student Exchange Program Recipient
In Support of SB 2140
March 8, 2021

Chairman Owens and members of the House Education Committee:

I'm Victoria Laven, and as a Professional Student Exchange Program (PSEP) recipient, I would like to voice my support of SB 2140. I am from Fargo and am currently a freshman at the University of Minnesota College of Veterinary Medicine.

I believe I speak for myself and my fellow veterinary student recipients of PSEP when I say that the importance of the passage of the SB 2140 bill cannot be understated. I have career goals that include specializing and becoming a board-certified veterinarian, a process which can take up to six years post-graduation due to the need to complete an internship and a residency. Currently, North Dakota does not have any approved internship or residency training programs that would allow me to achieve this goal.

My career goals also include earning a living wage sufficient to support a family and pay back the substantial student loan debt I will have acquired. According to the 2018 AVMA Report on the Market for Veterinarians, while accounting for all other factors, obtaining a board certification and serving in a residency leads to a higher mean income. Studies and data on this topic continue to show that the earning power of a board-certified specialist is significantly greater than a general veterinary practitioner. The service payback provision would prevent me from becoming board certified and earning a salary that would improve my quality of life.

Finally, I would like to contribute to my profession and community in a meaningful way and becoming board-certified would allow me to do so. Specialists are in demand at universities, private practices, and in industry. Becoming a board-certified specialist would allow me to obtain a breadth of knowledge and a unique skill set that I could eventually bring back to North Dakota, ultimately helping to improve the quality and diversity of veterinary services available in the state. However, in order to make this meaningful contribution I will need flexibility, of which the service payback provision does not provide.

On a personal level, the implications of the service payback provision are steep as well. North Dakota has a very limited job market for the career that my partner is pursuing. This will not only cause he and I financial hardship but will also impede our ability to be together and start a family. It is

extremely discouraging to think that myself, and potentially some of my fellow PSEP recipients, will be faced with the choice of fulfilling the service payback provision, but limiting our education and training, or taking on even more student debt in order to achieve our goals and be with loved ones.

Throughout my life, I have continued to return to North Dakota of my own volition, this is evidenced by my decision to move back home after graduating college, studying at NDSU in order to complete my pre-requisite courses for veterinary school, and making my final choice on veterinary school based on its proximity to my hometown. Data shows that without the obligatory provision to return to the state, this trend will continue, as veterinary graduates return to North Dakota at a higher rate than both dentistry and optometry graduates. Due to the constrictions and potential for increased student loan debt, I fear that the service payback provision will actually have the opposite effect of its intent and make it less likely for veterinary graduates to return and stay in North Dakota.

Please know I am extremely grateful to be a part of the PSEP and to have the continued support of my state. I strongly believe if SB 2140 were to pass, it would enable myself and my fellow veterinary students to become better citizens and representatives for North Dakota.

Thank you for the opportunity to address the committee and express support of SB 2140.