



North Dakota Veterinary Medical Association

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Testimony of Laura Beaudoin, DVM

In Support of HB 2140

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I am Dr. Laura Beaudoin, an associate veterinarian in Dickinson, as well as the president of the North Dakota Veterinary Medical Association. I am here today to encourage you to support SB 2140, which repeals the "Comeback or Payback" provision that was added to the Professional Student Exchange Program (PSEP) during the final days of the 2019 Legislative Session.

As a young veterinarian, I have first-hand knowledge of what the PSEP program means to North Dakota veterinary students and have several concerns with the payback requirement. These concerns include the ability to pursue a chosen career, the availability of veterinary jobs and the ability to obtain decent salaries.

I graduated from the Colorado State University (CSU) Veterinary College in 2013. As a recipient of WICHE funding, I can attest to the fact that this program makes a major financial impact on students. My parents completely supported me in my decision to apply to veterinary colleges but were cognizant enough to teach me about the cost of education and to look at the starting salary and lifelong earning potential of being a veterinarian. With this knowledge, when I was originally offered a position at CSU as an out-of-state resident with no financial aid assistance, I turned it down. Unfortunately, I couldn't make the numbers work. I turned down my dream, hoping I'd qualify for one of the PSEP programs and understanding I may have to choose another career path. Thankfully, I qualified for WICHE funding and was able to accept a position to fill the ND WICHE seat at CSU.

I share this story because this isn't a scenario for ND students that want to be pharmacists or human medical doctors because these programs are offered in ND, at resident tuition rates. My friends who went to medical school didn't have to consider a different dream because the cost of out-of-state education was too expensive to allow them to pursue it, and there is no requirement for them to serve in ND after graduation. I believe the state legislature understands that it is impossible to have professional colleges for every career path, which is why ND participates in PSEP. The PSEP website states the goal of the program is to help less populous states, like North Dakota, to be able to educate their students in a variety of health care professions, such as veterinary medicine, without the cost of setting up their own in-state programs.

I have also recently dealt with the ND veterinary job market; once in 2013 as a new graduate and again in 2015 after practicing for two years in a rural, mixed-animal practice. Based on my job searches, I have a serious concern for the quality of jobs that will be available to students when they are required to take a job in ND. In 2013, I didn't have any geographical restrictions. I just wanted to be back in my home state of ND. I looked at jobs all over the state, but just because there was a veterinary position available didn't mean it was a good fit for me. Out of at least 10 clinics advertising for veterinarians, there were only two looking to hire and mentor a mixed-animal veterinarian while offering a salary with which I

could make my loan payments. In 2015, I was a mixed-animal veterinarian moving to the Dickinson area looking for a job in my realm of the veterinary profession. Unfortunately, there were no large- or mixed-animal clinics in the area that were hiring. Therefore, I changed my career path and took a job at as a small-animal practitioner. I'm afraid for the new graduates that will be forced to take jobs at clinics they don't fit into, clinics that don't offer any mentorship, clinics that don't focus on their preferred species, and clinics where they can't make a viable salary, just because they accepted state funding to receive an education ND isn't able to offer.

Finally, I have concerns about what a large influx of veterinarians in the state year after year will do to already low salaries and poor benefit packages. Veterinary medicine is not known to be a lucrative career. The median veterinarian salary with three to four years of experience in ND is only around \$76,000. Even lower starting salaries make it really hard to budget for monthly payments on with an average debt load of \$163,000 at graduation. With more and more veterinary students being forced to return to ND or take on an additional \$50,000-\$130,000 in debt to pay back PSEP money, ND veterinary clinics won't have to increase salaries or benefits to recruit veterinarians; graduates will be forced to take those jobs simply because they need a job within the state borders.

In summary, I encourage you to support SB 2140 because PSEP isn't a veterinary recruitment tool, it is creating a level playing field for our pre-veterinary students to follow their career aspirations and accept employment that fulfills them and financially supports them. I'm happy to answer any questions.