

Testimony Opposing Senate Bill 2129

Presented to the Workforce Development Committee

Date: February 14, 2025

Chair Sen. Mike Wobbema and Members of the Committee:

My name is Kay LaCoe, I am here today to express my **opposition to Senate Bill 2129** due to its unintended consequences on alternative and specialized animal care in North Dakota. While I understand the need for updating veterinary regulations to reflect changes in the profession, I am deeply concerned that this bill overreaches in ways that could **significantly limit access to proven, complementary treatments** such as chiropractic care, acupuncture, osteopathy, farriery, and massage therapy.

I come before you today not only as a concerned advocate for alternative animal care but also as an animal owner and highly skilled and decorated equestrian. My experience in competitive equestrian sports has given me firsthand knowledge of the critical role specialized alternative therapies play in maintaining peak animal performance and welfare. My competitive horses would not be able to compete at the national level or recover from injury, and my non-competing horses would also suffer without access to chiropractic care, osteopathy, farrier and dental work – all specialties requiring years of training and certifications.

Unintended Consequences of SB2129

This bill expands the definition of veterinary medicine to include "complementary, integrative, and alternative therapies"—without clear exemptions for licensed, trained, or certified practitioners in these fields. The result is that these professionals, many of whom have years of specialized training, would be required to obtain a veterinary license or operate under a veterinarian's supervision.

I acknowledge that amendments have been offered to address some of these concerns, but I have not yet had the opportunity to review them. I must rely on what I have been told by several practitioners—that while these amendments may address some concerns, they still fall far short of resolving the issues I will outline in my testimony. The practical implications of this are:

- **Loss of Access to Specialized Care** – Many practitioners providing chiropractic, acupuncture, osteopathy, and equine bodywork have highly specialized expertise. If they are required to work under a veterinarian's approval, this will limit owner choice and potentially remove services from the state altogether.
- **Increased Burden on Veterinarians** – North Dakota already faces a shortage of veterinarians, especially in large animal and equine care. Requiring veterinary approval or oversight for every alternative therapy provider would increase workload, create bottlenecks, and delay necessary care for animals.
- **No Training Requirements for Veterinarians in Alternative Therapies** – This bill does not require veterinarians to have any specific training in chiropractic care, acupuncture, osteopathy, or bodywork, yet it gives them sole authority over these disciplines. This means a vet with no training in equine chiropractic adjustments could legally perform them, while a licensed, highly trained equine chiropractor would be restricted from doing so. This contradicts best practices in animal welfare.

- **Added Costs to Animal Owners** – If every alternative therapy provider must seek veterinary approval or supervision, the cost of animal care will increase. Many veterinarians will likely charge for these approvals, which will make alternative treatments more expensive and less accessible to livestock owners, horse trainers, pet owners, and breeders.
- **Creates an Uneven Playing Field** – Current practitioners already operate under ethical and professional guidelines, many with national certifications requiring continuing education. This bill disrupts their ability to practice while allowing veterinarians to perform services without specialized training.

A More Balanced Solution

Rather than eliminating or severely restricting these skilled professionals, I urge the committee to amend SB2129 to achieve its intended purpose—clarifying veterinary practice standards—without negatively impacting alternative care.

A more targeted approach would:

- Define clear exemptions for trained, certified, and credentialed alternative care providers, such as chiropractors, acupuncturists, massage therapists, farriers, and osteopaths.
- Require veterinarians offering specialized therapies to meet certification standards in those fields—just as human doctors must be trained in a specialty before practicing it.
- Protect the veterinarian-client-patient relationship without creating an undue monopoly on alternative care services.
- Consider a study resolution to ensure that future changes to veterinary law are evidence-based, practical, and reflective of input from veterinarians, alternative therapy practitioners, and animal owners.

Final Thoughts

North Dakota’s veterinary industry may need modernization, but it must be done without limiting access to safe, effective animal care. SB2129, risks creating a regulatory environment that benefits neither veterinarians nor the public. I strongly urge the committee to consider amendments that protect access to alternative therapies while still upholding professional standards in veterinary care.

I respectfully ask for a “**Do Not Pass**” recommendation or comprehensive amendments that include exemptions for properly trained professionals.

Thank you for your time, and I welcome any questions.

Sincerely,
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