

VTPRK Testimony

Hello, my name is Rachel Jones. I am a junior at Kansas State University College of Veterinary Medicine in the Veterinary Training Program for Rural Kansas known as VTPRK.

Good afternoon, thank you for allowing me to speak on behalf of the VTPRK in support of House Bill 2605.

My father, Dr. Brett Jones is a mixed animal veterinarian and practice owner in Liberal, KS. As a child, I spent my days away from school going on farm calls with dad, taking naps on dog food bags, and naming every calf he delivered or stray dog that was brought to the clinic. It was the best childhood. However, I also witnessed the reality of being a solo practitioner in a rural area. My dad was on call every night and weekend for 18 years. My dad made every effort to attend all of my games, dance recitals, and other activities but often he was called away for an emergency. The duty of caring for our clients and patients shaped all of our family activities, holidays, and vacations. This reality is one that I had to accept at a young age and one that my own children will affirm.

As veterinarians, we are often tasked to fill the role of doctor, nurse, dentist, public health liaison, and animal welfare advocate. We are educated in preventative care, medicine, surgery, pathology, parasitology, and pharmacology for numerous different species. We are trained to recognize, report, and limit the transmission of detrimental animal diseases. Diseases like Foot and Mouth Disease or African Swine Fever would have a devastating effect on the agriculture industry and the economy on the state and national level. It is our job to care for pets, herds, and protect the community and food supply.

The VTPRK program was created to be a full scholarship for veterinary students that would pay \$20,000 per year for four years. This program was established in 2006 and since then the parameters for population as well as the scholarship amount remain unchanged. For perspective, in 2006 I was 7 years old, today I am 15 months away from graduating with a doctorate in veterinary medicine.

In 2006, tuition at the Veterinary school was \$5,304.50 per semester. For one year, the cost of attendance was \$10,609.00. The scholarship amount exceeded tuition costs by \$9,397.00 which was used for campus fees, elective courses, externships, and VTPRK related travel for special educational experiences.

Tuition at K-State Vet Med has been frozen at \$11,256.00 per semester since 2016. When the cost of campus fees and elective courses are included, my spring tuition bill was \$13,359.00 – the cost for 21.5

credit hours. A year of tuition, when factoring in fees and elective courses, is \$26,718.00. As a VTPRK student, my scholarship does not cover \$6,718.00 per year.

In 2006, the difference between the VTPRK scholarship and tuition costs was \$9,397 per year, totaling \$37,228.00 in excess of tuition costs over 4 years. Today the same difference is -\$6,718.00, indicating that a VTPRK scholar would owe an additional \$26,872.00 in tuition and fees during their tenure at the veterinary school. Based on the above differences, the VTPRK scholarship's economic value has decreased by over \$64,000 since 2006. It is no longer a full scholarship.

In the Fall of 2021, I posted my resume on the American Veterinary Medical Association job board. Within two hours I was flooded with job offers from all across the United States. All of them offered salaries over \$100,000 with extensive benefits packages. I am committed to Kansas, but the temptation to leave the state is evident for those who were not selected for the VTPRK program. Compared to our colleagues entering in companion animal practices across the nation, starting salaries for food animal veterinarians in Kansas average \$25,000 less. In the class of 2023, there were 13 exceptional students with established roots in Kansas that would have been excellent additions to the program. Currently, the VTPRK scholarship is limited to five recipients. There are more qualified students in each class that could be retained in the State of Kansas by reducing the burden of their educational debt.

The average amount of educational debt for a new graduate in Kansas is \$187,315. My VTPRK colleagues and I will have significantly less debt than the average student. Reducing our debt makes buying a house or pursuing practice ownership more attainable. I believe there are viable opportunities in rural Kansas for mixed animal veterinarians to make a good salary, and practice ownership can be an important part of the long-term financial success. Therefore, making less money as a starting veterinarian can be offset long-term if the ability is present to invest in a practice. This program has had a 98% long term success rate. It grants the ability to choose where we go after graduation and equips us with the skills necessary to be successful in a rural community.

An aspect of the VTPRK program that makes it successful can be found in the opportunities it provides for VTPRK students. Opportunities include but are not limited to:

- The program encourages students to take multiple business electives to encourage practice ownership.
- During the summer after freshman year, each VTRPK class was taken on tours of packing plants, feedlots, and rural vet clinics.

Another aspect of the VTPRK program that makes it successful is the sense of community it provides.

Examples of this include:

- The program hosts monthly meetings with Dr. Brad White, Dr. Bob Larson, and the other VTPRK recipients where VTPRK graduates talk to us about their practice and how they approach client communication and business management.
- In January of each year, there is a VTPRK alumni reunion to further our contacts and support throughout the state.

The connections I have made through this program account for a large proportion of the externships I have completed and all of the practices I am considering for employment have a VTPRK alumni on staff. The constant interaction with VTPRK alumni and current students is exactly what makes this program successful. Kansas State College of Veterinary Medicine has developed a network of support for VTPRK students. I value our interactions because they know exactly what I am experiencing in school and challenge me to be a better vet. I strongly believe that removing the program from the vet school to be controlled by another entity would be a detriment to the program and the state of Kansas. VTPRK is much more than a program. It is a community.

The addition of an advisory committee would further exhibit the college of veterinary medicine's commitment to transparency and excellence based on collaboration.

I am here today as a woman from rural western Kansas, the daughter of longtime rural practice owners, and most importantly a current VTPRK student. For myself and my fellow recipients VTPRK began as a 4-year commitment and evolved into a lifetime opportunity to serve our local communities and the State of Kansas.

Thank you for taking the time to hear my testimony in favor of HB2605.