
FROM THE DESK OF MATTHEW R. KELSO, DVM

TO: SENATE AGRICULTURAL COMMITTEE; SEN. KERSCHEN, CHAIR

FROM: MATTHEW KELSO, CLASS OF 2020 VTPRK ALUMUS

SUBJECT: WRITTEN TESTIMONY, HB 2605

DATE: MARCH 8, 2022

Senator Kerschen and Senate Agriculture Committee Members,

I write this memo voicing my strong support in favor of HB 2605, relating to the Veterinary Training Program for Rural Kansas (VTPRK). I was privileged to receive this loan when I was in veterinary school (2015 – 2020) at Kansas State University and have the unique experience of seeing how this valuable use of funds directly impacts Kansas.

It is well known that the cost of education continues to remain nearly impossible to pay without the help of student loans. The loan provided by the VTPRK allows us to take out fewer total student loans, decreasing the amount to pay back after completion of formal education. On a personal level, this program allowed me to have the freedom to have less of a need on outside funds during my education (e.g. funds from a job, family, etc.) to help support my day-to-day basic functions (e.g. groceries, medicine, etc.), which allowed me to further focus on my education and getting the most out of what my years in veterinary school had to offer.

Now that I am out in private practice, I do not consider my four years of working in a rural community as “payback” but rather as helping establish myself professionally in a community that I intend to remain in for years beyond my repayment period. It is not a secret that a mixed animal veterinarian or a food-animal exclusive veterinarian makes a salary considerably less than a colleague who goes into companion animal exclusive practice – having almost a \$15,000/year salary difference, according to 2019 data.¹ When student debt totals are well into the 6-figures with the average student having almost \$150,000 in debt¹, every dollar counts and personal finances have to be considered when choosing a career path in the profession. This can make it a challenge for veterinarians to come out of school and enter a career path that creates a greater challenge towards loan repayment – but the VTPRK makes it possible for students every year.

¹ Bain, B., Hansen, C., Ouedraogo, F., Radich, R. and Salois, M., 2020. *2020 AVMA Report on Economic State Of The Veterinary Profession*. American Veterinary Medical Association.

With the amount of money forgiven to me, I can practice in an underserved county as well as financial well-being. The rate of burnout in our profession continues to rise and we routinely see financial strain being a contributing factor to this. I can establish myself in a community, I am a homeowner, and feel comfortable calling this community my home. Without the support of the VTPRK program, I am not sure I would have the financial ability to be stable in my community and still practice in an underserved community.

While money is a major consideration for this program, I think that an often-overlooked part of the program is the network that it creates. Every year since the program's inception, there have been 5 graduates selected, having over 75 veterinarians practicing in Kansas with yet another common link. The program helps students while in school to connect with rural practices, helping to build on a network of colleagues while still in school. In addition to everything already available to a veterinary student, students in this program have access to even more resources, connections, and community – all of which are vital for success upon graduation.

Finally, I would like to briefly mention the impact that this program has on the economy of Kansas. Annually, Kansas Agriculture accounts for 12% of the Gross Regional Product, with beef cattle alone contributing 8.7 billion dollars.² This contribution to our economy would not be possible without the veterinary community contributing to the health and safety of these animals. Ensuring there is adequate veterinary resources should be a vital mission of this committee and the VTPRK is one program helping ensure there are veterinarians to support this important sector of our economy.

As I have discussed above, I believe the VTPRK more than pays for itself and benefits countless Kansans. The discussed changes to the bill that your committee is considering will do nothing but improve the reach of the program, continue to incentive veterinarians to serve Kansas communities, and advance the goals of supporting Kansas agriculture. To me, these should be no question – an expansion of this program is a win for the state of Kansas.

I appreciate you taking the time to read my thoughts on this program. My contact information is shown below, and I would be happy to correspond with any member of the Committee with further questions about my experience in the program.

Respectfully Submitted,



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² Kansas Department of Agriculture, 2021. State of Kansas 2021 Economic Contribution Report.