



THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

HOUSE BILL 1133

AGRICULTURE – VETERINARY PRACTITIONERS – STUDENT LOAN FORGIVENESS PROGRAM

MARCH 3, 2023

SUPPORT

GOOD AFTERNOON CHAIR BARNES, VICE CHAIRMAN CHANG, APPROPRIATIONS COLLEAGUES: I AM PLEASED TO PRESENT HB 1133, ESTABLISHING THE VETERINARY PRACTITIONER STUDENT LOAN FORGIVENESS PROGRAM. THIS PROGRAM ADDRESSES THE VETERINARY SHORTAGE IN MARYLAND BY SELECTING PARTICIPANTS BASED ON EXPERIENCE, TRAINING, AND ELIGIBILITY TO WORK IN HIGH-NEED AREAS SUCH AS RURAL AREAS, LOW-INCOME AREAS, EMERGENCY PRACTICES, NONPROFIT SHELTERS, MUNICIPAL SHELTERS, AND OTHER UNDERSERVED AREA BY FORGIVING LOAN DEBT OF \$20,000 PER YEAR (CAP OF 5 YEARS), WITH THE COMMITMENT OF TWO YEARS OF SERVICE IN MARYLAND, PER DISBURSEMENT. THE PROGRAM IS CAPPED ANNUALLY AT TWO MILLION DOLLARS.

BY THE TIME VETERINARIANS FINISH SCHOOL, THEY HAVE PAID OVER \$250,000 IN TUITION. OFTENTIMES, STUDENTS ARE FORCED TO TAKE OUT MASSIVE LOANS TO COVER EDUCATIONAL EXPENSES, LEAVING NEW VETS WITH CRIPPLING DEBT. THIS USUALLY HAPPENS AT THE SAME TIME IN THEIR LIVES WHEN THEY ARE STARTING FAMILIES AND BUYING THEIR FIRST HOMES. IT BECOMES FINANCIALLY IMPOSSIBLE FOR THEM TO ESTABLISH A PRACTICE, ESPECIALLY IN LOW-INCOME AND/OR RURAL AREAS, WHERE CLIENTS ARE NOT ABLE TO PAY TOP DOLLAR FOR CARE. A NEW PRACTICE REQUIRES SEVERAL HUNDRED THOUSAND DOLLARS TO ESTABLISH. HB 1133 WOULD PROVIDE SOME RELIEF FROM THEIR SCHOOL DEBTS, ALLOWING A NEW VET TO PRACTICE OUTSIDE OF THE RICHEST AREAS OF OUR STATE.

ACCORDING TO THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF VETERINARY MEDICAL COLLEGES, THERE ARE ONLY 32 ACCREDITED VETERINARY SCHOOLS IN THE COUNTRY – FEWER THAN ONE SCHOOL PER STATE. MARYLAND HAS ONLY ONE INSTITUTION WITH A VETERINARY DEGREE, THE VIRGINIA-MARYLAND COLLEGE OF VETERINARY MEDICINE, WHICH IS SHARED WITH THE STATE OF VIRGINIA. IT IS LOCATED IN BLACKSBURG, VIRGINIA. STUDENTS DON'T ALWAYS RETURN TO MARYLAND AFTER THEY HAVE COMPLETED THEIR EDUCATION AND HAVE ESTABLISHED PROFESSIONAL NETWORKS IN THE VICINITY OF THEIR INTERNSHIPS. SINCE THE MARYLAND VETERINARY STUDENTS LEAVE OUR STATE FOR SCHOOL, THEY MAY NOT COME HOME WHEN THEY FINISH.

FURTHERMORE, THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC RESULTED IN AN SURGE OF NEW PETS. DATA FROM THE AMERICAN SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS (ASPCA) ESTIMATES THAT CLOSE TO 1 IN 5 HOUSEHOLDS ACQUIRED A CAT OR A DOG SINCE THE BEGINNING OF THE PANDEMIC WHICH HAS INCREASED THE STRAIN ON THE ALREADY CRITICAL VETERINARY SHORTAGE.

IN RURAL AREAS, AGRICULTURAL VETERINARIANS ENSURE THAT THE EVERYDAY ANIMAL PRODUCTS THAT MARYLANDERS CONSUME ARE SAFE AND IN COMPLIANCE WITH REGULATORY AGENCY WELFARE STANDARDS. AGRICULTURAL VETERINARIANS ALSO WORK TO PREVENT MAJOR DISEASE OUTBREAKS THAT COULD CRIPPLE OUR ECONOMY, AND DEEPLY AFFECT OUR LIVES. THIS TYPE OF VET SHORTAGE COULD PUT US AT RISK FOR A PREVENTABLE ECONOMIC, SANITARY, AND ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS.

MR CHAIR, DEAR COLLEAGUES, I URGE YOU TO SUPPORT THIS PROGRAM TO ENSURE THAT WE TAKE A STEP TO ADDRESS THE VET SHORTAGE THAT IS IMPACTING OUR STATE. I ASK YOU FOR YOUR FAVORABLE REPORT ON HB1133.