



MARYLAND VOTES FOR ANIMALS

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February 28, 2024

To: Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
From: Lisa Radov, President and Chair, Maryland Votes for Animals, Inc.
Re: Higher Education – Janet L. Hoffman Loan Assistance Repayment Program – Eligibility – SB 900 – Support

Chair Feldman, Vice - Chair Kagan, members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. My name is Lisa Radov. I am the President and Chair of Maryland Votes for Animals. We champion humane legislation to improve the lives of animals in Maryland. Speaking for Maryland Votes for Animals, our Board of Directors, and our members across Maryland, I respectfully request that the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee vote favorably for Higher Education – Janet L. Hoffman Loan Assistance Repayment Program – Eligibility – SB 900.

This bill would expand the eligibility for the Janet L. Hoffman Loan Assistance Repayment Program to include individuals who received a certain degree from an accredited veterinary school and provided veterinary services for a certain time at certain animal shelters.

The lack of staff veterinarians and volunteer veterinarians providing support to our shelters places pressure on local government budgets. Increasingly, pet owners are looking to shelters and rescues to help with veterinary procedures, from vaccinations to spay/neuter to more complicated diagnostics and care. Our shelters strive to provide these services but must prioritize vet services for the animals in their care. Without adequate staffing or volunteer practitioners, shelters cannot adequately meet the needs from the community. When pets get surrendered, the shelter must pay for daily care and feeding for that animal until a new home can be found. Shelters are stretched beyond their limits as they end up paying private veterinary rates for procedures needed for surrendered animals and shelter animals.

This bill is a moderate, fiscally constrained proposal that uses an existing program to streamline administration costs. The bill simply adds a new category to the incredibly successful Janet L. Hoffman Loan Assistance Repayment Program which is administered by the Maryland Higher Education Commission and has successfully added new categories of recipients in past years. The recipient pool is constrained in two ways: The types of shelters or rescues that qualify, using a standard definition and reporting requirements in the code. By the number of hours of service provided by staff and volunteer veterinarians.

- A staff veterinarian must be at least part-time (20 hours a week) to qualify.
- A volunteer veterinarian must provide at least (15 hours of services a week) to qualify.

Our shelter partners recommend reducing this threshold to 8 hours a week. We are happy to work with this committee to determine what threshold best balances the intent of the legislation with the fiscal reality of the state budget. The modest investment in funding this program will have multiple benefits:

- Easing the veterinary shortage that is projected to be getting worse over time – and that disproportionately felt by people and pets living in underserved areas.
- Cost-saving for local governments to ensure that their shelters and rescues can continue to provide care without outsourcing or having to accept surrendered animals because their owners could not receive care.

It's time to expand the eligibility of The Janet L. Hoffman Loan Assistance Repayment Program to qualifying Maryland veterinarians as they provide a much-needed services for Maryland residents - including those with four feet.

In closing, I would like to thank Senator Corderman for his sponsorship of SB 900 and ask the committee for a favorable report.