

Dear Maryland General Assembly Members,

I am writing to ask for your support for Bill SB1182 / HB1388. It is imperative we eliminate non-competes in the state of Maryland. They are antiquated, have far reaching negative consequences in both veterinary and human healthcare, and adversely affect the public interest.

In my very personal circumstances, I had been with my recent veterinary hospital for nearly ten years until two weeks ago. At the onset, I signed a contract when hired at a much more naive point in my life and professional career. In hindsight, I should have had a lawyer review the contract before signing to better guide me, alerting me to the risks of locking myself into the chains that then bound me. Over the years, the main issue affecting my life directly was the ten mile noncompete I agreed to when signing that document. I was a young mom with a 2 year old daughter when I first came to work there. I had been practicing veterinary medicine for 6 years at that point. I initially practiced in Gaithersburg, Maryland later making the switch to Sandy Spring, Maryland- immediately adjacent to Olney. Olney is the town I had grown up in since the age of 4 and the town I had returned to after having my first child to be near my family, allowing for help with childcare and offsetting that rising expense.

I had my second child about a year after moving to this local practice. My daughter entered preschool right around the corner from the practice as it was very convenient geographically and logistically. By this time, countless red flags had revealed themselves at this practice, indicating it wasn't the right fit for me long term. A continuous negative culture enveloped this practice, manifested by the owners, that trickled down to affect myself, other veterinarians and many of the support staff. Issues leading to the negative culture included discriminatory attitudes toward myself and others that were working parents and needed schedules adjusted at times to accommodate for both regular care and emergencies that inevitably arise with having children, frequent turnover of staff (due to the negative culture) leading to regular shortages that placed additional strain and stress on all of the remaining staff, not keeping up with market value compensation of the veterinarians (myself included) and staff, dismal conflict resolution, unprofessional/disrespectful conversations with the superiors, and lack of appropriate human resources within the hospital, just to name a few. I witnessed the entire staff turn over nearly five times in that ten years and watched numerous wonderfully skilled, emotionally intelligent veterinarians depart.

I had one foot out the door for years as a result of these issues and had not been able to pull the plug because of the non-compete clause in my contract. I grew up in this town, have an extensive friend and family network here- the majority of which are clients of mine. I have deep connections and close relationships to these clients and their pets that trust me to care for them. Having to consider alternative employment options ten miles or more away would mean placing undue strain on these trusted clients to have to travel to see me when they still want me to provide care for their beloved animal companions and family members. In this area, that translates to at least 20-30 minutes of travel time and often more. In an era where time is of high value and very limited quantity for most people, that time and distance would be unnecessarily inconvenient for them.

Through all of my discord at this practice, myself, like many others faced with feeling trapped in sub par and detrimental conditions, I was one of the statistics that reached the lowest of lows at the worst of it. I never considered suicide despite at least moderate depression, but 7 years ago when my son was only several months old, I hit rock bottom in my mental health. One night out of the blue, I had a debilitating panic attack that sent me to the emergency room. I suffered repeat attacks for weeks and then months. I was still breastfeeding my son so I wasn't inclined to take medication at that point. I

relied on multiple mental health professionals to help me temper the panic attacks and severe anxiety that had emerged down to a level where I could still function both professionally and personally. It's taken years and the eventual addition of medication, along with continued therapy to regain control of my mental health, as well as my physical health that suffered as a consequence of the psychological issues. While I may be predisposed to anxiety, as many of us are; it became clear that years of working in this practice with the inability to take another job in or very near my hometown to be close to my children, their and my support network of family and friends, and the clients that rely on me- contributed largely to my mental health crisis.

Over the last several years, I've explored many alternative job opportunities and ultimately continued to grin and bear the dire conditions at the local practice because it allowed me to be close to my children, family, and bonded clients. However the cost to my mental and physical health enduring these conditions was quite high. I very recently made the painfully tough decision to leave this practice without any definitive further employment lined up. Due to the non-compete clause in my contract, my options to continue practicing small animal medicine are restricted to a distance and travel time that is just not feasible to allow balancing my family life, professional life and maintaining my physical and mental health. This ultimately has meant that I am giving heavy consideration to leaving this corner of the veterinary profession, which is already suffering a significant shortage in veterinarians, to possibly pursue a job in the government sector as it would not violate my non-compete.

Just four years ago at the onset of the pandemic, I watched my recent former employer threaten and start to pursue legal action against a close friend and veterinary colleague of mine that used to work at this same practice. She had accepted a position with another practice that was right around 9 miles away, would be giving her the market value compensation she deserved and was located minutes from her home, family, and daughter. Ultimately unable to afford the legal fees to fight the ten mile non compete she also had in her contract, my colleague had to work at an alternate practice even further from her home for a period of one year until she could move to the original practice after her noncompete term expired. The extreme difficulty and emotional toll this placed on my colleague were unjust and unnecessary.

As I have talked with countless veterinarian after veterinarian about this topic, they all too often have a similar story to share or arduous conditions they've had to endure because of a noncompete clause. In addition to the very personal effect this issue has had on me, non- competes attempt to prevent owners from following a veterinarian if they leave a toxic practice. A practice should not be allowed to possess ownership of a client. Clients have an inherent right to decide who should provide medical care to their pets, as they should with who they choose take care of themselves medically in the human healthcare sector. Multiple other states have already abolished noncompetes for veterinarians or do not uphold enforceability of these clauses.

Maryland needs to follow suit to remove an outdated, deleterious precedent and do what is in the best interest of the veterinarian, the veterinary profession as a whole and the public interest. We graciously ask for your support in this matter.

Sincerely,
Dr. Jenny Kinnetz-Krueger

