

My name is Lorraine DiRienzo and I am a Maryland horse owner in support of SB 1182/ HB 1388. Last fall, I had a terrifying experience when my horse went into atrial fibrillation. Terrified as I was thinking about what lie ahead, I was equally grateful to be navigating this diagnosis with an extraordinary vet who's cared for my horse for 5 years.

But right as we were figuring out the next steps, the rug was completely pulled out from under me. My vet had to leave his current practice and could no longer treat my horse at our barn due to a non-compete clause.

To deal with my horse's ongoing heart issue, I now have to transport him up to a hospital in Pennsylvania, several hours away. I do not have a trailer, so not only do I have to take off an entire day of work and arrange after-school child care, my barn manager also has to take off work to drive us there, adding hours of time and hundreds more dollars to an already expensive outing. The \$100 assessment that our one vet could accomplish in a half hour barn visit now takes 6-8 hours and costs at least five times that much.... Money, I should mention that is leaving the state on a regular basis at every barn affected by this non-compete.

Even so, I know it could be worse. When another horse at our barn became ill and the non-compete prevented his longtime vet from coming to our barn to provide emergency care, the owner was forced to put her horse on a trailer in agonizing pain and drive two hours through beltway traffic to the equine hospital in Virginia. Sadly, that horse died the next day. Who knows if he might have lived had the vet who knew him best been able to come to our barn to treat him immediately.

I still feel completely lost not having my trusted vet follow up on my horse's ongoing health issues. I am terrified that we'll have a dire emergency of our own and won't be able to get someone out fast enough. Continuity of care has been shattered right when I needed it most.

Finding a local vet just to get *routine* care is getting harder and harder in Maryland. It can now take over a week to get a doctor out to see your horse and appointments are regularly delayed for hours or rescheduled again and again because the only vet available is also on call for emergencies. Enforcing a non-compete against this backdrop makes zero sense. There is clearly plenty of work to go around--far more in fact than the existing vets in our area can even handle.

Bottom line, I really don't understand why I as a consumer don't have a choice in who provides care to my animal. If the practice owner wishes to protect their investment there are other tools available – like non solicitation clauses or return of service agreements. Flat out prohibiting a patient from seeing their chosen doctor feels punitive to the humans and cruel to the animals.