

HB 1388 - FAV

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I am testifying in favor of HB 1388.

I am a horse owner who has been harmed by non-compete agreements in veterinary employment contracts. I believe my horse suffered immensely and ultimately died due to a loss of continuity of care resulting from the current non-compete laws.

My horse had been boarded in Maryland since 2019 and we used our barn's preferred vets out of a full emergency facility less than 15 miles away. Our barn had a close relationship with the experienced equine vets who visited our farm and they were well acquainted with our horses' history and management.

In the winter of 2022, my horse was found lying in his field in the snow, shivering from cold and shock. We called our local vets who were at the farm within the hour. The attending vet recommended we haul to the hospital for emergency care and my horse was being intensively treated within 25 mins. While his condition was serious and his prognosis was very poor, with quick treatment he was able to make a full recovery and return to his previous level of work within months.

Unfortunately, in Dec 2023, he was found lying in the field again and appeared very uncomfortable. This time, the vets who had previously treated my horse could not see him, due to current non-compete laws. We also did not have the same access to our nearby emergency facility as it was no longer fully staffed. In an industry with a shortage of equine vets, it is incredible that there remain laws that further restrict employment options for qualified doctors.

The vet who was able to see my horse that day had never met him before. They did not have my horse's full history and relied on our memory for information. When this vet referred my horse to a hospital, we had no option but to haul to Marion duPont Scott Equine Medical Center in Leesburg, VA—70 miles and an hour and a half away in light traffic. Trailering even a healthy horse can take a toll on their mind and body as they must be alert and constantly shift balance to stay upright. This trip was during a rainy evening rush hour and my horse, in dire condition, was on the road in stop and go traffic for nearly two hours.

While the vets at Leesburg did all they could, they were starting at a disadvantage due to the long trip and lack of medical history. We no longer had access to the valuable knowledge of a vet who had known the horse and its quirks for years, and in this case, who even had the experience of diagnosing and treating a similar episode of illness in the recent past.

This time, my horse did not recover and passed away the next day. I did not get to say goodbye. His health declined so quickly I would not have had time to drive to the hospital. He died at the young age of ten.

My hope is that my best friend and riding partner of seven years did not die in vain and that this testimony will serve to support the passing of HB 1388.

I believe it is my right and responsibility to choose who cares for my animals and any law that discourages a practicing vet from seeing any animal infringes on that right. I believe the current law has a negative impact on equine welfare, not just for my own animals, but for all animals in Maryland.

Sincerely,

Maryland horse owner