

Written testimony by and in support of bill HB 1388

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Dear Honorable Delegates of the State of Maryland. I submit this written testimony in favor of HB 1388 to prohibit non-compete agreements in health care and veterinary professions. My name is Dr. Brittany Williamson. I am a horse veterinarian specializing in sports medicine and rehabilitation. I'm here to support HB 1388 and give a personal testimony of how this issue is affecting me. I moved to the state of Maryland 7 years ago and began to build a client base of horse owners while I still worked for another practice out of state. When I joined a practice in Southern Maryland it was my express intent to make this practice my forever home. It was agreed upon by the current owner of the business that after several years of working as an associate, I would be permitted to buy-in to the business and eventually become the owner. I brought my current clients to the practice and my reputation brought others throughout the four years I worked there. This practice had a single owner and at first it seemed like a good fit. However, over time it was clear that I did not share the same views on business, patient care, or ethics. As the business owner's desire and ability to practice decreased, I saw the cost of tests and medications increase to make up an easy dollar. Medications were frequently marked up 500-600% or more, making them unaffordable for the average owner, and sacrificing patient care.

The business had multiple health and radiation code violations, and the owner repeatedly lied to government organizations about these violations. For example, the Maryland department of radiological health requires that all x-ray generators be registered with the state and then inspected and calibrated annually. This business owner chose not to register or have 4 of her 5 units safety inspected and calibrated for the entire time I was employed there. As a result, employees were potentially exposed to an unknown amount of scatter radiation on a daily basis. I myself suffered a miscarriage during my employment and I can't help but wonder if this was the cause, as lead gowns do not protect against all scatter radiation. I was not alone in this situation. I drove a co-worker to the emergency room while she cried and bled through her clothes as she suffered an early miscarriage. I mourned the loss of an otherwise healthy pregnancy with another co-worker at 16 weeks gestation. During my 4 years of employment, there were 6 pregnancies at the practice, to my knowledge, and 50% of them ended in miscarriage. Despite being fully aware of her radiation violations, instead of correcting the issue, she instructed her office manager to lie to radiological inspectors about the number of x-ray generators that she owned.

Another issue that directly impacted me was an unreliable emergency on-call service. I shared ambulatory on call with the owner and another associate veterinarian. Yet when the owner was on call, she would sometimes be hours away from the practice or simply refuse to see emergency cases. This meant that I was essentially on call 24/7 for all clients with which I had a close business or personal relationship. If I wasn't available, I couldn't guarantee that an animal wouldn't be left in distress without care, which happened on multiple occasions. When the other associate veterinarian left the practice, the owner placed me on call for sometimes a week at a

time while she went on vacation, even though this was a violation of the negotiated terms of my contract.

These things ultimately led me to leaving the practice and starting my own business. Because of a non-compete clause in my contract, owners close to the practice are now having to haul their horses over an hour away for care. This causes increased stress on the animal and undue hardship on the owner. Because there are so few specialists in my field, owners that are unable to bring their horses to me have resorted to using out-of-state veterinarians to come to their farm. This is revenue leaving the state of Maryland that otherwise would not if I was permitted to work in their area. Maryland is on the verge of a veterinary crisis, particularly in equine medicine. Statistics calculate that the ratio of equine veterinarians to horses is 1:1300. The profession demands long hours and hard work, both physically and emotionally. If we are going to keep equine veterinarians in the state, we need to do everything we can to protect the physical and mental health of these professionals. While Maryland is the most horse dense state in the country, the main reason I chose to move to Maryland was to be closer to family. That proximity to family is an important factor that protects my mental well-being. A recent study published in September 2023 in JAMA reported that health care workers had a 32% increase in suicide rates compared to non-health care professions. I don't think that anyone could argue that the lack of a support network and/or hurdles to proper patient care aren't contributing to this crisis.

I firmly believe non-compete clauses protect poor business practices and prevent providers from advocating for better patient care and better working environments. In speaking with health care workers in many fields, I have heard the same story over and over again. Business owners made decisions based on profit, not on patient care, and when the health care workers advocated for what they believed to be best for their patients, they were threatened with termination or terminated and their non-compete clauses were upheld. The number one priority for health care in Maryland needs to be just that, health and care, not money and greed. I also firmly believe that patients are not assets to be bought and sold. A patient or animal owner should have the right to choose the provider that is best for them regardless of who they work for. And that is why I am here today advocating for health care workers and to support House Bill 1388. Thank you.

Brittany Williamson, DVM