

Dear Maryland General Assembly Members,

I am writing to ask for your support for Bill HB1388. We need to eliminate non-competes in the state of Maryland. They are antiquated at this point in time and have far reaching negative consequences in the veterinary profession, as well as adversely affecting the public interest.

In my personal circumstances, I have been with my current veterinary hospital for nearly ten years. I signed a contract when I was 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 I signed it. Over the years, the main issue affecting my life directly was the ten mile non-compete I agreed to when signing that document. I was a young mom with a daughter around 2 years old when I first came to work here. I had been practicing for 6 years at that point. I initially practiced in Gaithersburg, Maryland later making the switch to Olney, Maryland- the town I had grown up in since I was 4 years old and the town I had returned to after having my first child to be near my family to help with childcare and offset that rising expense. I had my second child about a year after moving to the Olney practice. By then, there were already a number of red flags at this practice that it wasn't the right fit for me. My daughter entered preschool right around the corner from the practice as it was very convenient with me and my family nearby. Unfortunately, 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. Some of the items leading to the negative culture were 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 kids, frequent turnover of staff leading to regular shortages that placed additional strain and stress on all of the staff, not keeping up with market value compensation of the veterinarians (myself included), poor conflict resolution, unprofessional/disrespectful conversations from superiors, and lack of appropriate human resources within the hospital, just to name a few. I have had one foot out the door for years as a result of all of these issues and have 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 look at options ten miles away would mean that this would place an 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. In this area, that translates to at least 20 minutes of travel time if not more and in a time where time is of very limited quantity for most people, even 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 one point. I never considered suicide and I wasn't severely depressed although there was a fair level of 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, at the time believed to be a food allergy reaction. I suffered for weeks and then months. I was still breastfeeding my son so I wasn't inclined to take medication at that point to help. I relied on multiple mental health professionals to help me temper the panic attacks and severe anxiety down to a level where I could still function professionally and in my personal life. It's taken years and the eventual addition of medication, along with continued therapy to regain control of my mental health and 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. Present day, I'm still stuck at this practice. I am now in the middle of a divorce and having to consider my professional options so that I can afford to keep my kids in their childhood home. Again, 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.

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 practice should not be allowed to own a client. They have an inherent right to decide who should treat their pets, as they do with who should take care of them medically. Multiple other states have already abolished non-competes for veterinarians and it has even been introduced at the federal level. Maryland needs to follow suit and remove an outdated, deleterious covenant 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