



February 13, 2025

Hon. Ben Barnes  
Maryland State House of Delegate  
Appropriations Committee  
121 Taylor House Office Building  
6 Bladen Street  
Annapolis, MD 21401-1991

Re: House Bill 0643, Janet L. Hoffman Loan Assistance Repayment Program Eligibility

Dear Chair Barnes:

On behalf of the Maryland Zoo in Baltimore, I am writing to convey our support for House Bill 0643, which would provide financial relief for veterinarians and veterinary technicians who face large educational debt while serving the nonprofit sector. HB0643 seeks to expand the eligibility criteria of the Janet L. Hoffman Loan Assistance Repayment Program to include individuals who receive a degree from an accredited veterinary school and provide veterinary services for a certain time period in the State of Maryland.

The Maryland Zoo employs veterinarians and veterinary technicians to care for the over 1,500 animals in residence, representing over 130 species. As a non-profit organization in need of highly skilled veterinary staff with specialized training, we believe it is critical to reduce the burden of school debt to attract and retain talent at our Zoo. According to the American Veterinary Medical Association, more than one third of veterinary technicians have student loan debt, averaging approximately \$30,000, and they earn between \$21-25/hour in their work.<sup>1</sup>

Additionally, this bill would reduce administrative burden and is fiscally constrained, as it proposes to use an existing repayment program with demonstrated success.

On behalf of the Maryland Zoo, I respectfully request your favorable support of HB0643.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kirby Fowler".

Kirby Fowler  
President & CEO

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<sup>1</sup> Veterinary technicians are being paid more but still face concerns about wages, burnout, and debt, according to NAVTA survey results from nearly 2,000 respondents. C. Lederhouse. [AVMA News in: Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association Volume 261 Issue 4 \(2023\)](#); accessed February 10, 2025.