February 18, 2025

To: House Appropriations Committee
From: Lisa Radov, President and Chair, Maryland Votes for Animals, Inc.
Re: Higher Education – Janet L. Hoffman Loan Assistance Repayment Program – Eligibility – HB 643 – Support

Chair Barnes, Vice Chair Chang, members of the House Appropriations Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. My name is Lisa Radov. I am the President and Chair of Maryland Votes for Animals. We champion humane legislation to improve the lives of animals in Maryland. Speaking for Maryland Votes for Animals, our Board of Directors, and our members across Maryland, I respectfully request that the House Appropriations Committee vote favorably for Higher Education – Janet L. Hoffman Loan Assistance Repayment Program – Eligibility – HB 643.

This bill would expand the eligibility for the Janet L. Hoffman Loan Assistance Repayment Program to include individuals who received a certain degree from an accredited veterinary school and provided veterinary services for in the State for no less than 5 years, or provided volunteer veterinary services at certain animal shelters and to include individuals who provided veterinary technician services for a certain time period or provided volunteer veterinary technician services at certain animal shelters.

The lack of staff veterinarians and volunteer veterinarians providing support to shelters places fiscal pressure on local government. Increasingly, pet owners are looking to shelters and rescues to help with veterinary services such as vaccinations and spay/neuter to more complicated diagnostics and care. Shelters strive to provide these services but must prioritize the most urgent veterinary services for the animals in their care. Without adequate staffing or volunteer practitioners, shelters struggle to adequately meet the needs of the community. When pets get surrendered, the shelter must pay for daily care and feeding for that animal until a new home can be found. Shelters are stretched beyond their limits as they end up paying private veterinary rates for procedures needed for surrendered animals and shelter animals.

This bill is a moderate, fiscally constrained proposal that uses an existing program to streamline administration costs. The bill simply adds a new category to the incredibly successful Janet L. Hoffman Loan Assistance Repayment Program which is administered by the Maryland Higher Education Commission and has successfully added new categories of recipients in past years.

Expanding this program would incentivize veterinarians to work in Maryland and help ease the veterinary shortage that is a nationwide problem especially for people with pets living in underserved areas. It would provide fiscal relief for local government as their shelters and rescues would have veterinarians in-house as opposed to outsourcing to get veterinary care for their animals at a higher expense - or having to accept surrendered animals because their owners could not receive veterinary care for their animals.

It's time to expand the eligibility of The Janet L. Hoffman Loan Assistance Repayment Program to qualifying Maryland veterinarians as they provide a much-needed services for Maryland residents - including those with four feet.

Vice Chair Chang, you were a sponsor of this bill last session, so I hope that we can once again count on your support.

In closing, I would like to thank Delegate Guyton for her sponsorship of HB 643 and ask the committee for a favorable report.