

TO: House Committee on Agriculture, Chairman Rahjes

FROM: Dr. Brady Luke, Beloit, Kansas

RE: Proponent Written Testimony on HB 2605 – Concerning the Veterinary Training Program for Rural Kansas

DATE: February 15, 2022

My name is Brady Luke and I am a veterinarian in Beloit, KS. I graduated in 2014 from the KSU CVM and was a recipient of the VTPRK Scholarship. I am writing in adamant support of the VTPRK program, which assisted me in establishing a career and a family in rural Kansas. I am a 3<sup>rd</sup> generation rural veterinarian; my grandpa graduated from KSU CVM in 1947, so veterinary medicine has always been my life. I have had the opportunity to see how rural veterinary medicine has changed firsthand and have also listened to my family talk about how it has changed. I recently received an email from a fellow veterinarian in opposition to the VTPRK program. This email said it is a good thing for new vets to have a debt load because associate veterinarians earn enough money as is, making this program unneeded. I took this personally both as a recent graduate and a business owner. Times are different now. My dad could go on harvest for a summer and pay his tuition and living expenses with that money. Eight years ago, I could make \$6,000 working the entire summer welding—this doesn't even cover half of tuition, let alone living expenses, and I am a frugal person.

The VTPRK program helped me come out of veterinary school with less than \$10,000 in debt, so buying a home in the town I work in was very feasible because of this low debt load. Buying a home is the first step in becoming established in a community; as a business owner, this is the very thing I want my associate veterinarians to be able to do. Having so little debt allowed me to buy into a large practice, further establishing myself in the community. I had two classmates with enough debt coming out that it made it impossible to get a bank loan to buy into their practices. I want my associates to be able to buy into the practice, to help them financially and to create a deeper, official sense of ownership. This program has been a blessing to so many clinics and students in rural Kansas. We need to keep helping the future of rural Kansas—the students.

The only thing in the bill I disagree with is increasing the population requirements of the area from 35,000 to 40,000. While I understand the frustration of veterinarians in a rural setting near a large city like Wichita or Kansas City, they still have the benefit of being close to the entertainment, shopping, etc. of those cities. Most new graduates don't want to be isolated to a small rural town all the time; thus, being near a city is a great recruiting tool that counties with a population greater than 35,000 already possess. Our closest city is 90 minutes away, and oftentimes this distance makes it difficult to recruit, as we lack a variety of locations where they could go meet people or make friends. Giving these areas the VTPRK program would only exacerbate their recruiting advantage, thereby working against the program's original intent. Those clinics around large cities also have a much higher likelihood of finding a veterinarian from the surrounding area due to population alone. Students are much more likely to go to an area or clinic close to home, so the population difference makes a clinic around a large city 20 to 30 times more likely to find someone from the area, once again taking from the original intent of the bill. I am adamantly opposed to this part of the bill. Overall, the VTPRK program is crucial to our survival in rural veterinary medicine and the people we serve.

Sincerely,

Brady Luke, DVM