

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 15

Requesting the Board of Veterinary Medicine, in consultation with the State Veterinarian, to study the shortage of large animal veterinarians. Report.

Agreed to by the Senate, February 12, 2024
 Agreed to by the House of Delegates, March 4, 2024

WHEREAS, as of 2023, the shortage of rural veterinarians has reached an all-time high as 500 counties in 46 states have been deemed to have a critical shortage of large animal veterinarians; and

WHEREAS, only three to four percent of new veterinary graduates have entered food animal-related practice over the past 20 years; and

WHEREAS, by providing preventative care, disease treatment, and strategies for herd health and productivity, large animal veterinarians are a critical resource for farmers; large animal veterinarians can help prevent large-scale loss of herds or flocks when a highly transmissible disease sweeps through an area; and

WHEREAS, if the current downward trend in large animal veterinarians continues, there will be cause for concern for a safe food supply, the potential for widespread animal disease outbreaks, and a decline in the economic vitality of rural communities; and

WHEREAS, while the State Veterinarian designates areas of the Commonwealth that have a shortage of large animal veterinarians so students from such areas can apply for partial federal loan forgiveness programs, the current program fails to attract students in such areas of most need; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the Senate, the House of Delegates concurring, That the Board of Veterinary Medicine, in consultation with the State Veterinarian, be requested to study the shortage of large animal veterinarians.

In conducting the study, the Board of Veterinary Medicine and the State Veterinarian shall (i) identify ways to strengthen existing debt repayment programs for veterinarians, including making recommendations on how to simplify application criteria, exploring state matching loan repayment programs, limiting barriers for participation, and improving methods for consistent identification of veterinary shortage areas to better target rural communities in need; (ii) examine options for developing programs that offer business support to provide incentives or low-interest business loans for large animal private practices; (iii) identify programs that support a strong pipeline of veterinary students from rural backgrounds and help such students navigate post-secondary education to increase retention; (iv) examine other possible solutions for increasing the number of large animal veterinarians in the Commonwealth, such as expanding veterinary technician-type or physician assistant-type programs to allow large animal veterinarians to expand their scope of practice in rural areas; and (v) reexamine the recommendations from the 2010 study on the shortage of large animal veterinarians published pursuant to House Joint Resolution 730 (2009).

Technical assistance shall be provided to the Board of Veterinary Medicine and the State Veterinarian by the Virginia-Maryland College of Veterinary Medicine at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, the Lincoln Memorial University College of Veterinary Medicine, the Virginia Farm Bureau Federation, the Virginia Veterinary Medical Association, the Virginia Academy of Food Animal Practitioners, the Virginia Agribusiness Council, the Virginia Department of Business Assistance, Virginia Department of Health, the Virginia Economic Development Partnership, and the Virginia Tobacco Region Revitalization Commission and a member of the House of Delegates appointed by the Speaker of the House of Delegates and a member of the Senate of Virginia appointed by the Senate Committee on Rules. All agencies of the Commonwealth shall provide assistance to the Board of Veterinary Medicine for this study, upon request.

Upon completion of the study, the Board of Veterinary Medicine shall submit this report to the House Committees on Agriculture, Chesapeake and Natural Resources and Education and the Senate Committees on Agriculture, Conservation and Natural Resources and Education and Health, and these standing committees shall review the findings and recommendations of the report for appropriate legislative, policy, and budgetary implications and actions, and make such recommendations as necessary.

The Board of Veterinary Medicine shall complete its meetings for the first year by November 30, 2024, and for the second year by November 30, 2025, and the Board of Veterinary Medicine shall submit to the Governor and the General Assembly an executive summary and report of its findings and recommendations for publication as a House or Senate document for each year. The executive summaries and reports shall be submitted as provided in the procedures of the Division of Legislative Automated Systems for the processing of legislative documents and reports no later than the first day of

the next Regular Session of the General Assembly and shall be posted on the General Assembly's website.