

Oregon Legislative Testimony Regarding HB 2167

Veterinary Medicine Workforce Development and Disease Detection

House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water

Representatives Helm and Owens, Co-chairs

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Testimony provided by Susan Tornquist, DVM, MS, PhD, Dip. ACVP, Lois Bates Acheson Dean, Carlson College of Veterinary Medicine, Oregon State University

The Carlson College of Veterinary Medicine (CCVM) is the only veterinary school in Oregon and one of only 33 accredited veterinary schools in the United States. The CCVM provides training to supply future veterinarians for the state, performs the testing for infectious diseases affecting all animal species including humans in Oregon, operates a Veterinary Teaching Hospital that provides medical, surgical, and preventive care for animals, and conducts cutting edge research in problems affecting the health and well-being of people, animals, and the environment.

Addressing Rural Veterinarian Shortages through Workforce Development

A shortage of veterinarians is currently well-documented both in Oregon and across the country. There are currently 6 federally-identified veterinary shortage areas in Oregon. These areas are in Douglas, Sherman, Tillamook, Klamath, Crook and Umatilla counties where there are chronic shortages of food animal veterinarians to support area farmers and ranchers. This negatively impacts Oregon agriculture which accounts for 13% of the state's GDP. Veterinary practices across Oregon are also often continually seeking to hire associates for their practices that serve companion animals that are important for the health and well-being of Oregonians.

The Oregon Employment Department recently released a report that showed the fastest-growing occupations in Oregon. Veterinarians were 8th on the list with a predicted job growth rate of 25% from 2023-2033. Nation-wide, the Bureau of Labor Statistics projects job growth for veterinarians to continue at a 19% rate through 2033, in comparison to the overall projected 4% growth rate for all professions. A recent analysis by Indeed shows the #1 profession with at least 20% growth and high pay over the last three years is veterinarian. Opportunities for veterinarians have more than doubled between 2021 and 2024 and clearly that trend is continuing.

The CCVM currently educates and trains approximately 90 new DVMs per year. To maintain that rate of training, additional resources are needed to continue to provide the excellent, often one-on-one, hands-on education required for competent veterinary graduates.

For more information:

Katie Fast, Executive Director of Government Relations
Katie.fast@oregonstate.edu

Katheryn Yetter, Assistant Director for State Policy
Katheryn.yetter@oregonstate.edu



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Testing for Emerging Diseases that Affect Public Health

An increasingly important function of the CCVM is in the ongoing diagnosis of and surveillance for infectious diseases in the state. The Oregon Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory (OVDL) is the only accredited veterinary laboratory in Oregon and it works closely with the state veterinarian and the state public health veterinarian to perform the testing of samples from animals, milk, and the environment, including potential insect vectors of disease. This testing is crucial for the protection of animals and humans from infectious disease such as the current threat of Avian Influenza- H5N1. This virus has been long infecting mostly the wild bird population, but has had significant impact on domestic poultry flocks, thus impacting food prices, in the last few years. It is now infecting many mammals including humans and is increasing in its ability to cause significant disease and death. The OVDL was the first lab in the country to diagnose H5N1 in a pig, which is a species in which virus mutation is common and allows for inter-species transmission. The OVDL also was the first to document death in cats from eating H5N1-infected raw cat food. Data from OVDL testing of poultry and livestock is shared with the USDA to ensure national coordination of information regarding agricultural animal disease around the country.

In addition to infectious diseases affecting domestic animals, the OVDL performs testing for infections in wildlife that is important for outdoor recreation. Chronic Wasting Disease has not yet been diagnosed in Oregon deer, but it is very close to our borders and rigorous testing and surveillance is necessary to prevent it from adversely impacting our deer population. Other infectious diseases affect many animals from sea lions and harbor seals on the coast to West Nile virus in numerous species.

Ongoing research in the CCVM is addressing a number of infectious diseases including those that affect food safety. In addition, researchers are working on continuous improvement of diagnostic tests to provide better and quicker testing.

Collaborating to Strengthen Our State

The CCVM contributes in other ways important to Oregon. In 2021, the OVDL tested over 300,000 human samples for COVID, demonstrating the importance of having a well-funded, well-staffed laboratory that can respond quickly to a surge in demand for testing such as that happening right now as we test milk samples for H5N1. OVDL is the only lab in the state qualified/positioned to test these samples. Additionally, after the Labor Day wildfires of 2020, a group called the DAMvets was initiated to provide training and organization for veterinary support for animals displaced or otherwise adversely impacted by wildfires. Veterinary students, faculty, and staff at the college are prepared to work with the state veterinarian to ensure health and safety of animals. The CCVM regularly provides veterinary care for animals belonging to the Warm Springs confederated tribes including castration of wild horses.

2025-27 Request

The CCVM at Oregon State University plays an essential role in ensuring public and animal health through disease surveillance, diagnosis, and the training of future veterinarians. State support for veterinary medical education and cutting-edge disease diagnostics in Oregon has lagged the rest of the

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nation for decades, leaving the state vulnerable to emerging disease threats and with too few veterinarians to support animal agriculture. As operational costs have risen in the last few years, the University allocation to the CCVM has not been adequate to cover costs. The university is requesting **\$10 million** for the veterinary teaching hospital and **\$3.5 million** for the OVDL to continue the programming funded under SB 5701 (2024). The funds will address the severe shortage of veterinarians in rural Oregon, support ongoing veterinary education to meet the current and future needs for more veterinarians in the state, and will enhance our capacity to combat significant health threats to animals and humans. Your support will help us continue to protect and improve the health of our community, wildlife, and the environment.

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