

Submitter: Kate Schoenhals
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Natural Resources and
Wildfire
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB976

Dear Chair Golden, Vice Chair Nash, and Members of the Committee:

I am an equine veterinarian currently working as a Rural Veterinary Practice Clinical Instructor at Oregon State University's Veterinary Teaching Hospital. As a horse owner, equine veterinary practitioner, animal welfare advocate and educator of future veterinarians, I strongly oppose SB 976.

Adequate dental care for horses involves an understanding of equine dental development, anatomy, physiology and pathology as well as the knowledge and ability to direct necessary diagnostic and treatments based on findings for each patient. Furthermore, appropriate dentistry requires a physical exam including detailed SEDATED oral component in order to identify which diagnostic and treatment interventions should or should not take place. The field of equine dentistry has advanced far beyond the routine rasping or "floating". Any practitioner claiming they can do adequate dentistry evaluation and treatment without sedation is not doing right by the horse. Significant and irreversible damage can be done to horse mouths by inadequate knowledge and understanding of the complexities of the equine mouth as well as the horse's response to sedation, medication, and necessary analgesics that have become standard of care in veterinary dentistry.

Horses should have trusted care providers which means the training necessary to administer care needs to be defined and sufficient to cover the depth of clinical skill required to maintain standard of care in dentistry. Blanket statements from current bill such as "valid degree or certification in equine dentistry and is practicing equine dentistry within the scope of that degree or certification" do not define this validity nor is there a legitimate organization to assess the efficacy of such training. This would place horses under severe risk to their health and wellbeing unjustly. A horse won't die from a bad dental fast, but it can suffer for a significant amount of time and the resulting condition may or may not be treatable. Much of the damage caused by inadequate training may not be readily apparent after a simple dental float but can fester and be revealed weeks/months later, confounding horse owner's understanding of where the problem originated. Additional diagnostics may also be necessary in order to reveal the damage/problems caused by poor dentistry which often requires radiographs or other advanced imaging techniques. If a dental practitioner can't be held accountable for damage done, what will stop them from harming the next several heads of horses and so on? How will they even know if they have made a mistake?

The horse industry is vulnerable to a lot of gimmicks and “quick fixes” that rarely offer what they advertise. We should not propagate this further by allowing unregulated certification and training to perform actual diagnostics and treatment in horses. What defines valid? Who is offering the certificates and who is validating the certifiers? What are the components of their national and state exam for licensure? Existing "equine dental schools" may make a lot of claims to offer their expertise but without an UNBIASED accreditation process, it is nothing more than words, self-promotion and potentially false advertising.

Examination, diagnostic and treatment directions for medical care of animals should remain in the hands of trusted veterinary professionals where it belongs. The checks and balances of veterinary training are not perfect but they force accountability and constant re-evaluation. This directs the opportunity to improve and advance veterinary care for the better of our patients along the way. Let's keep it that way and protect our horse population's mouths. Good dentition is necessary for good health!

Thank you for your time in reviewing this testimony. Voting “NO” on this poorly defined legislation is the right thing for current and future horses with dental needs in OR.