

Feb 21, 2025

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

I am writing this letter in opposition to SB 976.

I have been in the equine industry in various capacities in Oregon since 1994. As a horse owner, business owner, previous veterinary assistant, and current leader of a nonprofit organization with 30+ horses at any given time, I have a unique perspective on equine dentistry.

Through the years, I have worked with the veterinarians of several practices. All of them have been knowledgeable about equine dentition and have taken extra training to keep up on the latest techniques and research. I have only once had a horse that needed a repeat visit due to misalignment after having their teeth floated out of literally hundreds of appointments. Horses have been properly sedated and I have been confident that appropriate follow up care was prescribed and scheduled when necessary, including antibiotics, tooth extraction, and referrals to specialists.

By contrast, I have also tried out a couple of non-veterinary equine dentists through the years after references from friends. I was not convinced that their techniques were any more effective and I witnessed my horses in distress due to not being sedated. I never had anyone out for a second visit and have not and will not try that route again.

We have also had multiple horses come into our program whose teeth were permanently damaged by non-licensed dentists. One horse, Pickles, had his teeth rounded so aggressively that the chewing surfaces were no longer able to chew regular hay. His poor owner could not figure out why he was losing weight and spent a lot of time and money trying to address other issues that were byproducts of his teeth. She ended up sending him into our care to see if a different herd and facility could help. Once we had our veterinarian team out to assess him, they were able to ascertain the real issue and we have been able to feed him on a diet of pelleted and chopped hay. He is now thriving, but his feed bill is twice what it could have been if the layperson dentist had not overstepped their knowledge and ruined his chewing surfaces.

As mentioned above, I am responsible for a large herd of horses (typically around 30 head). All of them receive regular dental exams and floats when needed. I have never had a difficult time scheduling appointments. We utilize four different veterinary clinics to serve our large herd. All of them have at least one, if not more, highly qualified veterinarians available for this work. Oregon State University also offers dental work. There is not a scarcity issue right now. However, I have concerns that there will be an issue if we take away a steady source of income from our veterinary practitioners who are already struggling with increasing costs and higher than average burnout and mental health concerns.

I urge you to vote no on SB 976 for the health of our equine partners.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Amber H. Varner". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Amber Varner