



**Testimony by Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine at Tufts University
to the Joint Committee on Higher Education and Employment Advancement
Connecticut General Assembly
Regarding House Bill 06292
February 10, 2009**

Thank you Senator Handley, Representative Willis and members of the Committee for the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of House Bill 06292, an act concerning an appropriation to provide assistance and access to schools of veterinary medicine.

Speaking on behalf of the Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine at Tufts University, it is a privilege for me to join with the Connecticut Veterinary Medical Association to urge that this bill be advanced.

Admission to veterinary school is a highly competitive process, made much more so if you reside in a state without a school or college of veterinary medicine. For example, MA residents comprise 50% of our class and are admitted in a ratio of approximately 3 or 4 applicants to 1 admitted student. For students, like those from CT, competing in the out-of-state admissions pool, that ratio more than doubles to 8 or 9 applicants for every student admitted.

As the only school of veterinary medicine in New England, we know that the demand for veterinary services in the region is growing. Connecticut alone will need a projected 241 new veterinarians between 2008 and 2014 to meet the need caused by increased demand for services and retirement of veterinary professionals.

Veterinary medicine is an important economic driver in CT and employs over 5700 people, including 840 veterinarians, primarily in clinical practice, commercial and scientific research and development, and in academic settings. The profession invests over \$520 million in payroll, operating expenses and capital projects and provides a great opportunity for entrepreneurship: over 40% of clinical practice veterinarians own their practices.

The total economic impacts of veterinary medicine in CT are estimated at over \$952 million. Veterinary medicine spending of \$521 million leads to an additional estimated \$431 million in spending and supports an additional 3,130 jobs throughout CT. Veterinary medicine contributes an estimated \$46 million to state and local tax revenues. The largest source of spending in veterinary medicine is clinical practice, which is responsible for \$559 million of the total economic impact.

Over one in ten veterinarians in CT specializes in academic or commercial life sciences research. In addition to caring for companion animals, veterinarians are responsible for the welfare of as many as 219,000 laboratory research animals in over 18 laboratories statewide. Commercial life sciences research contributes over one third – \$333 million – of the total impact of veterinary medicine on the CT economy.

Tufts University provides veterinary services to clients throughout New England and, in particular, to agricultural producers in CT. Our food animal medicine service, located in

Woodstock, CT, represents the largest mixed animal/food animal practice in Southern New England. Every student that graduates from Tufts spends at least a month serving the dairy farmers, small ruminant producers and other large animal owners of CT, including the University of CT. Over the past few years, we have watched the Tufts Ambulatory Service practice in Woodstock grow to eight veterinarians as surrounding practices have chosen to eliminate large animal services. This contraction of services to agricultural producers reflects a national trend that has left many regions of the country undersupplied with veterinary services.

Given the threat of pandemics and bioterrorism, a sense of urgency accompanies the training of veterinarians interested in public health. Over 70% of emerging infectious diseases in the past 20 years have been zoonotic (moving from animals to people) making the work of veterinarians critical to the protection of human and animal health.

Veterinary graduates feed the life sciences industry in CT by providing expertise in laboratory animal medicine, comparative pathology, public health and biomedical sciences. Furthermore, over 80% of new doctoral degrees in veterinary medicine are being earned by women who increasingly serve as role models for achievements in science and technology.

Educating veterinarians to meet the demonstrated need in CT is of the highest priority. We applaud the efforts of the General Assembly to provide assistance for CT residents seeking degrees of veterinary medicine. These students will graduate with an average educational debt of over \$100,000 that is not adequately offset by earning capacity. State support of veterinary education is critical to meeting the demands for veterinary services in CT and for leveling the playing field for CT students seeking to become veterinarians.

It is particularly fitting that the proposed program to provide assistance and access to schools of veterinary medicine for CT students be named in honor of Dr. Kirklyn Kerr. Dr. Kerr's stellar reputation as a veterinary scholar, leader and student advocate are well known and are an enormous credit to the University of Connecticut and to the state.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide these remarks and to support this important bill.

Respectively submitted,



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