

Testimony for Public Hearing- Appropriations Committee

Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee/UConn- Kirklyn M. Kerr Fund

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In Favor of Maintaining the Kirklyn M. Kerr Fund

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Connecticut Education has always been regarded as one of the finest, providing the next generation with the knowledge needed for future innovation. Funding has allowed for University of Connecticut laboratories to research pressing issues. It has allowed CT residents to graduate from the UConn Medical School, while paying in-state tuition rates. However, Connecticut does not fund an in-state veterinary school. CT residents lack access to a veterinary education that is available to residents in 47 other states. In response, the Kirklyn M. Kerr fund was implemented in 2009 to secure spots for five Connecticut residents to attend Iowa State University Veterinary School at in-state tuition prices. Governor Malloy proposes cutting this fund from the 2016-17 budget.

Entering the veterinary field requires years of preparation. An immaculate GPA, extracurricular involvement, and thousands of hours of preparatory work are needed for acceptance. Once admission has been granted, a long career dedicated to the health of animals and the humans who depend on them is dampened by the immense debt of graduate education. It is commonly misunderstood that veterinary graduates enjoy a high salary. In reality, new veterinarians work long hours for low wages, averaging \$67,136. The average debt load of these new vets is \$162,113, which is about \$1236/month for twenty years (2013 avma.com). Iowa State actually offers one of the most affordable programs, but for an out of state student the tuition alone is \$47,000 per year without room, board, fees, and travel.

For the past six years, the five most competitive pre-veterinary students from Connecticut have been able to commit to Iowa State University College of Veterinary Medicine at in-state tuition rates, where they gather the skills needed to assure that the beef cattle are fit for human consumption, that the cough your faithful dog has acquired isn't of concern, and that transported animals enter CT free from infectious disease. They have been able to attend due to the Kirklyn Kerr Fund. I have worked for eight years preparing myself to be one of these five most eligible students. I have done research on the effects of bacteria on poultry through UConn's Pathobiology program, helped pathologists analyze the causes of death in animals brought to the Connecticut Veterinary Medical Diagnostic Lab, experienced hands-on the relationship between pet owners and their animals by working in a local clinic for Dr. Chip Beckett, volunteered at the Department of Public Health in Hartford, and have promoted UConn's College of Agriculture, Health and Natural Resources as an Ambassador. As a student who has been accepted in the top five seats at ISU, and a woman who is passionate about the relationship between Connecticut's public health and veterinary medicine, I hope that you strongly consider keeping the Kirklyn M. Kerr Fund in the 2016-17 budget.

While I understand the difficulties in balancing the budget, it is imperative that students who have already committed themselves to ISU with the understanding that they have in-state tuition be supported through 2016-17. It is necessary for me to commit to ISU by April 15<sup>th</sup>, and find housing in Iowa well before the State budget is approved in June. Without it, I personally will be unable to attend veterinary school, unable to serve the State as a public health ambassador, and unable to further the veterinary research being done to improve medicine, as the additional \$80,000 in personal educational debt is not supportable on a new vet's salary in Connecticut or other states. Our state needs new veterinarians to continue our vital management of Public Health through infectious disease response and research, food safety, pharmaceutical and medical research, and homeland security.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Elizabeth R. Houston