

SENATE BILL REPORT

EHB 1705

As of March 13, 2025

Title: An act relating to large animal veterinarians.

Brief Description: Convening a work group to study and recommend strategies to recruit, train, and retain large animal veterinarians.

Sponsors: Representatives Dent, Reeves, Parshley, Connors and Bernbaum.

Brief History: Passed House: 3/6/25, 96-1.

Committee Activity: Higher Education & Workforce Development: 3/13/25.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Creates a work group to study and recommend strategies to recruit, train, and retain large animal veterinarians in the state.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Staff: Kellee Gunn (786-7429)

Background: The Washington State University (WSU) College of Veterinary Medicine was founded in 1899 and has graduated nearly 7000 Doctors of Veterinary Medicine. The WSU College of Veterinary Medicine offers graduate training programs in biomedical sciences, immunology and infectious diseases, molecular biosciences, and neuroscience, as well as a variety of programs and certificates tailored for veterinary scribes, technicians, and paraprofessionals.

The WSU Veterinary Teaching Hospital (Hospital) facility is the largest veterinary referral center in the Pacific Northwest and treats thousands of animal patients every year. The Hospital's Large Animal Services unit has board-certified veterinarians, residents, interns, students, and licensed veterinary technicians that provide a wide range of services,

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including: primary care, comprehensive diagnostics, internal medicine, reproductive care, as well as routine and advanced surgical procedures. The Large Animal Services unit specialized in horses, foals, dairy and beef cattle, pigs, sheep, goats, camels, llamas, and alpacas.

The WSU Division of Governmental Studies and Services (DGSS) is an applied social science research and outreach unit that draws upon faculty, staff, and student capacity with the mission of translating the resources of WSU for public benefit through research, technical assistance, and training projects with communities; state, local, federal, and tribal government agencies; and with select nongovernmental entities.

Summary of Bill: The DGSS must convene a work group to study and recommend strategies to recruit, train, and retain large animal veterinarians in the state. The work group must include the following members:

- the director of the Department of Agriculture, or the director's designee;
- the director of equity of the Department of Agriculture, or the director's designee;
- the secretary of the Department of Health, or the secretary's designee;
- the dean of WSU College of Veterinary Medicine, or the dean's designee;
- the Washington State veterinarian, or the veterinarian's designee;
- one representative from an organization representing veterinarians;
- one representative from an organization representing farmers and ranchers;
- one representative from an organization representing livestock producers;
- one adult leader representing a national youth development program that includes experiential learning in agriculture and large animal husbandry; and
- one representative from a historically marginalized community, such as a member of an organization that promotes the agricultural sciences and related fields in a positive manner among communities that have been historically underrepresented or marginalized.

The work group must provide a preliminary report to the Legislature by December 1, 2025, and a final report by June 30, 2026. The establishment of the work group expires July 1, 2026.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: We don't have enough large animal veterinarians, or veterinarians in general. Most veterinarians who graduate go into practice to focus on small animals as it is more financially lucrative. The veterinarian population is

dwindling. It's a huge commitment to become a veterinarian and hopefully this work group will come up with some answers to get more people into this profession. It takes about the same amount of time to become a veterinarian as it does a doctor. Those interested in this profession may not have the resources to become vets. This work group will give us more information.

Large animal veterinarians protect humans and our food resources. The veterinarian work force is shrinking. Data indicates that many veterinarian graduates do not enter animal grade veterinarian practices. WSU has not had an increase in the slots available for veterinarian students.

There are not enough veterinarians. Things such as the amount of student debt, low pay, shortage of staff for those in practice, and many others are the reasons people are not becoming veterinarians. The problem isn't a lack of interest. WSU's program is competitive, and there are not enough slots. By the time students graduate, these students owe an average of \$139,000. This is an issue that is front and center here at WSU, and nationally. This bill provides an opportunity to do a deep dive on the issues that are keeping individuals from entering this profession and working with these animals.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Representative Tom Dent, Prime Sponsor; Dori Borjesson, Washington State University; Greg Hanon, WA State Veterinary Medical Association.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: No one.