

Rural Veterinary Workforce Act (H.R. 4355/S. 2829)



The Rural Veterinary Workforce Act would increase access to veterinarians in veterinary shortage areas by assisting with the significant obstacle of educational debt, aligning tax code with human and other healthcare professions' award funds, and maximizing the funding allocated to the highly successful Veterinary Medicine Loan Repayment Program (VMLRP).



AVMA Supports

Key points



The VMLRP helps recruit and retain veterinarians in high-need areas by assisting with the significant obstacle of educational debt. Participants in the program receive up to \$75,000 toward student loan debt in exchange for three years of service in any USDA-designated veterinary shortage area.



In 2024, USDA designated 240 veterinary services shortage areas across 47 states. These shortage areas jeopardize animal and public health, endanger the nation's food supply and agricultural economy, and compromise the nation's ability to prevent the introduction and spread of diseases.



The Rural Veterinary Workforce Act would exclude VMLRP award funds from the recipient's gross income and avoid recycling appropriated dollars, thus freeing up federal funds and providing educational loan debt relief to help more food animal and public health veterinarians practice in high-need areas.

What is the problem?

- **Shortages of livestock and public health veterinarians leave our food supply and farm animals at risk**, while at the same time weakening the nation's animal health infrastructure, which is critical to protecting animal and human welfare.
- In 2023, 83% of veterinarians graduated with significant educational debt: over \$185,000 on average. This has a major impact on attracting veterinarians to rural communities and food animal or public health veterinary medicine careers, which typically pay less than companion animal practices.
- VMLRP helps recruit and retain veterinarians in high need areas by assisting with the student loan debt burden many veterinarians carry; however, **the program's applications routinely exceed available funding.**

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What does the Rural Veterinary Workforce Act do?

- The legislation would end the federal taxation the USDA is currently required by statute to pay on behalf of the award recipient, thus stopping the recycling of congressionally appropriated dollars through the USDA back to the U.S. Department of Treasury and freeing up 39% of the allocated money for the VMLRP.
- This will free up additional federal funds and allow more food animal and public health veterinarians to practice in the areas most in need while receiving educational loan debt relief.
- By doing so, the government would be treating the program awards in the same manner as the analogous program for physicians and other healthcare professionals (42 USC 254I-1).

AVMA's stance

- AVMA supports increasing veterinary services in high-priority shortage areas through the passage of the Rural Veterinary Workforce Act to help keep the nation's livestock healthy, our food supply safe and secure, and protect public health.
- Maximizing the funding to the VMLRP helps pave the way to addressing the current, historically high level of veterinary shortages.

Status of the bill

- Reps. Adrian Smith (R-NE), John Larson (D-CT), Michelle Fischbach (R-MN), and Jimmy Panetta (D-CA) reintroduced the Rural Veterinary Workforce Act in the 118th Congress, and it was referred to the Ways and Means Committee.
- Sens. Debbie Stabenow (D-MI) and Mike Crapo (R-ID) reintroduced the companion bill, which was referred to the Senate Finance Committee.

Cosponsor the Rural Veterinary Workforce Act (H.R. 4355 / S. 2829)

To cosponsor, please contact:

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