West Virginia Student Regional Contract Program
For Veterinary Medicine

Currently in the United States there are 28 colleges of veterinary medicine where students can pursue a degree of Doctor of Veterinary Medicine. This degree allows graduates to practice as a veterinarian after national and state licensure. Veterinarians play a vital role in providing effective health programs and humane treatment for food, companion and pet animals and their owners. Veterinarians also perform vital research, instruct future veterinarians, play a vital role in food safety, and are instrumental in homeland security. With only 28 colleges accepting students, gaining admission to these schools is highly competitive. West Virginia does not have a college of veterinary medicine within the state, to do so is not economically feasible.

Since 1954, by legislative mandate, the state of West Virginia has maintained the Veterinary Student Contract Program administered by the West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission. This program enhances the success of admission by West Virginia residents to veterinary schools and affords our students the best opportunity for academic training in a discipline not available within our State. Currently the program supports annually up to 13 students dispersed at the Virginia-Maryland Regional College of Veterinary Medicine (6), Mississippi State University College of Veterinary Medicine (5), and Auburn University College of Veterinary Medicine (2).

The West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission is facing a 7.5 percent budget cut in the funding for these contracts. This cut along with the current deficit (from yearly contract fee increases) will result in about a $266,000 shortfall in funding for the 2013-2014 school year. Over 30 West Virginia students have applied to the veterinary school contracts program in September of 2012 for the 2013-2014 freshman class. These students have prepared during 3 to 5 years of college education to enable them to apply to the West Virginia veterinary contract schools for the 2013-2014 school year. Veterinary schools interview prospective applicants in January and February of 2013. If the contracts are not funded the career aspirations of these students will be significantly diminished, as only 2-3 of the 13 current contract seats would be able to be filled. Parents will be equally disappointed after sending their children on a path to a career in veterinary medicine and they will not have the same chance of admittance to veterinary college as previous students. Current educational grant and award programs are exempt from the proposed budget cuts, but the Veterinary, Podiatry, and Optometry Student Contract Programs are not considered as financial aid and are facing the proposed budget cuts within the West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission.

Without a fully funded contract program the number of West Virginia residents gaining admission into veterinary colleges would be greatly decreased. West Virginia residents would be required to apply to veterinary colleges as “at large” applicants without the contracts. Veterinary colleges have very few “at large” positions, so only a small number, if any, West Virginia residents potentially would gain admittance to veterinary colleges each year. The cost to the families/students for those admitted would be significantly increased. The current shortage of veterinarians in West Virginia would be even greater, as fewer West Virginia graduates would be graduating with a degree in veterinary medicine. Ultimately food and pet animals and their owners in West Virginia would suffer from this deficiency of veterinarians. The Veterinary Student Contract Program gives West Virginia Residents the
opportunity to become veterinarians at costs far less than building and maintaining a veterinary college in our great state of West Virginia.

Time is of the essence to restore funding for this program. Students will start interviewing at prospective colleges in January of 2013.

Solution: Restore the funding through the West Virginia Governors Office or through the West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission (by defining this program as a student aid or grant program)

Thank you for your consideration. If you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact me.

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