

RESOLUTION #18—2023
Regular Annual Session

Submitted by
National Association of Federal Veterinarians

STATEMENT TO THE PROFESSION

RESOLVED, that the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) Board of Directors consider issuing a statement to the profession as noted below:

The AVMA recognizes the importance of public practice to the entire veterinary community. AVMA's Economics Division studied factors limiting private practice veterinarians from transitioning to public practice positions. Additional studies from AVMA and other veterinary organizations support efforts for recruitment and retention benefits from increased Congressional funding for all federal agencies' incentive programs such as the use of Special Pay (for specific hard to fill positions and locations), Specialty Pay (for Board Certification), Professional Pay (for pay equity with other medical professionals), removal of the annual salary cap in declared emergency disease outbreaks, student loan repayment bonuses and other incentives the agency deems appropriate to encourage more veterinarians to enter and remain in public practice.

Statement about the Resolution

Recruitment and retention of veterinarians in regulatory government service is presenting an ever-greater challenge –

Since 2009 the Government Accounting Office (GAO) has performed investigations into the status of the federal veterinary workforce. In February of 2009 they published a report titled: Veterinary Workforce: Actions Are Needed to Ensure Sufficient Capacity for Protecting Public and Animal Health. Each report since has come to similar conclusions of inadequate numbers to meet the needs of all government agency's full mission space of current and surge capacity emergency responses. Some federal agencies are experiencing vacancy rates as high as 40% in some areas despite instituting recruitment and retention incentives. Clearly, a more comprehensive approach to filling the chronic void in federal veterinary services is needed rather than the current inadequate patchwork of incentives. There are simple authorities within Office of Personnel Management (OPM) rules that agencies don't use to address the pay inequities between public and private practice driving the vacancy rates. Congress can pass funding bills to give veterinarians pay equity with their human counterparts to meet the requirements American and global communities need for public practice veterinary expertise to protect human and animal health.

According to the GAO Reports: "The federal government lacks a comprehensive understanding of the sufficiency of its veterinarian workforce." More specifically, four of five component agencies GAO reviewed assessed insufficiency of their current veterinarian workforce to perform routine activities and identified future concerns. This includes USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Services (APHIS), Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS), and Agricultural Research Service (ARS); and Department of Defense (DOD). Staff shortages and noncompetitive salaries were among the concerns identified. Moreover, there is no multiagency effort to search for shared solutions, even though 16 of 24 federal entities employing veterinarians raised concerns about workforce sufficiency. Further exacerbating these concerns is the number of veterinarians eligible for retirement. GAO's analysis revealed that 27 percent of the veterinarians at APHIS, FSIS, ARS, U.S. Army, and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) will be eligible to retire within 3 years."

The National Association of Federal Veterinarians (NAFV) is coordinating with a group of similar partners and constituents to address these critical shortages to include needs for local, county and state government veterinary workforce. The key areas of "Recruitment and Retention" focus

on the following: Locality Pay for the rural locations; Special Pay for hard-to-fill positions; Specialty Pay for advanced degrees, specialized training, and Board Certification that enhance the performance of the government agency's mission; Student Loan reimbursement beyond the Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program; and ultimately Professional Pay to bring public sector salaries to be competitive with the private sector.

NAFV is hoping to work with the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) to commission an updated GAO report since the last one was 15 years ago. Significant new one health challenges have increased the need for public practice veterinarians such as COVID-19, Avian Influenza, African Swine Fever, the persistent threat of climate change, and human encroachment on wild animals resulting in additional threats to human health from animal disease transmission. Also, the economics of veterinary medicine is driving new veterinarians into private practice rather than a career in public practice due to crushing student debt burdens. Historically, AVMA obtained additional resources for recruitment and retention in the USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service but more is needed across all federal agencies.

We are at a critical point in the delivery of regulatory veterinary oversight and expertise. Without filling these gaps of the veterinary workforce needs in the federal, military, state, county and local government agencies brings significant health and economic risk. Our food safety programs will be in jeopardy, our disease control mechanisms will not be up to the task of controlling such potential human pathogens as Avian Influenza or African Swine Fever, our international trade recognition status will be in question and the monitoring of potential human pathogens of animal origin will be suspect.

Financial Impact: None

	Board of Directors	House Advisory Committee	Reference Committee #5	House of Delegates
Recommend Approval	X	X	X (amended as noted below*)	X (amended as noted below*)
Recommend Disapproval				
Recommend Referral to...				
No Recommendation				
Recommend Postpone Indefinitely				

(use this space for additional narrative, if needed)

***Statement to the Profession**

New Resolution Title: New Policy on Recruiting and Retaining Public Practice Veterinarians