

Veterinary Student Debt Assistance Program for Ohio Set to Begin

Legislation (Ohio House Bill 67) passed in late 2020 and signed by Governor DeWine in January 2021 established the Ohio Veterinary Student Debt Assistance Program. Revenue for the program comes from any surplus funds remaining in the Ohio Veterinary Medical Licensing Board's budget at the end of each biennium.

House Bill 67 is the first of its kind the country, rechanneling unused veterinary license fee revenue back towards veterinarians to help address the growing veterinary student debt burden. OVMA was a strong advocate for the program which was born out of discussions with the representatives Kelly and Brinkman. They had initially sponsored a more narrowly focused bill seeking to incentivize veterinarians to perform charitable spay/neuter procedures in return for two hours of continuing education credit. OVMA raised concerns with that proposal and sought ways to broaden its scope and impact, which resulted in the final adopted version of HB 67.

While the legislation was enacted last year, enabling rules and a release of state funds were necessary before the program could actually begin. Both of these prongs have been achieved, and the application portal is now open at <http://ovmlb.ohio.gov/sl.stm>, (be sure to scroll down to the charitable loans section on the page). All aspects of the veterinary student debt assistance program will be managed by the Ohio Veterinary Medical Licensing Board.

Grants to veterinarians from the veterinary student debt assistance program will be awarded via random lottery among eligible applicants in a common pre-determined amount between \$5,000 and \$10,000. A total of \$273,742 has been placed in the veterinary student loan assistance grant fund for this cycle.

To be eligible a veterinarian must (Ohio Administrative Code 4741-3-08):

- ✓ Perform at least 12 hours of charitable veterinary services (see below for a breakdown of charitable activity that meets the criteria) within the past year.

- ✓ The veterinarian must be a U.S. citizen, national or permanent resident and have a current Ohio veterinary license.
- ✓ The veterinarian must have been engaged in the practice or instruction of veterinary medicine for more than six months prior to application.
- ✓ The veterinarian has educational loans which cover expenses incurred while enrolled in a college of veterinary medicine.
- ✓ Those veterinarians serving on the OVMLB or who have received an award under this program within the past three years are not eligible to apply.

If you apply and receive a loan repayment grant under the lottery you will be required to adhere to a written letter of intent that includes affirmation you will continue to perform charitable services of at least twelve hours a year for two years and remain a resident of Ohio for two years.

Charitable services are defined (Ohio Administrative Code 4741-3-07) as veterinary services performed without direct compensation other than reimbursement of any expenses. Services may include, but are not limited to, spay and neuter, vaccination clinics, assistance to government entities with animal disease outbreaks, and wellness exams and treatment of animals owned by “underserved populations in need”. To be eligible under the program the charitable services must be for a nonprofit organization, a humane society, a law enforcement agency, or a state/local/federal government entity.

At the time of application you will be asked to attest you performed at least twelve hours in the past year under the above criteria. If your name is drawn in the lottery as part the acceptance paperwork you will be further asked to provide some evidence from the hosting organization that you performed veterinary services (such a signed letter or other statement from the organization on its letterhead).

Depending on the amount of the award the OVMLB elects to provide under the program in 2022, dozens of Ohio veterinarians will be able to receive a substantial award towards their student debt repayment. OVMA was pleased to play an

instrumental part of this ground breaking approach to help address student debt load. We will continue to keep you apprised of new developments as the inaugural year of the program's implementation rolls out.

For a copy of the law (both the statute and enabling rules) please visit the members section of the OVMA website or contact the OVMA office.