



February 13, 2009

The Honorable Joseph I. Lieberman
Chairman
Senate Committee on Homeland Security
and Governmental Affairs
340 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Mr. Chairman:

The 91 undersigned organizations representing a broad range of interests relating to food animal agriculture, food safety, and veterinary medicine urge Congress to bolster recruitment and retention incentives for veterinarians employed by the federal government. More than 3,050 veterinarians presently serve on the front lines of the nation's food safety, public health, animal health and homeland security efforts. Veterinarians hold essential positions at a number of agencies, including the Departments of Agriculture, Commerce, Defense, Health and Human Services, Homeland Security, Interior, and the Environmental Protection Agency.

Federal veterinarians perform a variety of essential functions and hold a wide range of important jobs in federal agencies ranging from epidemiologists, pathologists, food safety inspectors and public health officials. They help ensure that we have safe and effective drugs for humans and animals, fight diseases that affect both humans and animals, as well as perform cutting-edge research that helps lead to ground-breaking discoveries benefiting both human and animal health.

Congress must take proactive steps to avert a catastrophe and ameliorate problems created by an inadequate federal compensation and incentive package. There is a projected shortage in public health veterinarians of up to 4 percent per year for the next 10 years. This shortage, when combined with the facts that more than a 100 veterinarians are needed to fill current positions and hundreds of veterinarians are on the cusp of retirement, makes it abundantly clear that federal agencies need to enhance recruitment and retention incentives if they are to fill present and future vacancies.

Competition for new graduates has become increasingly intense with the private sector winning out. Veterinarians have a multitude of choices on where and what kind of veterinary medicine to practice. Student loan debt exceeding \$120,000 often makes private practice the only feasible option for the nation's 2,600 new graduates each year. If federal agencies are to attract new veterinarians they will have to become more financially attractive.

Congress can and should correct inequities in the compensation packages for federal veterinarians. As a group, compensation for federally employed veterinarians lags behind other similarly trained federal health professionals. Congress should modify the U.S. Code of Federal Regulations to give veterinarians similar pay categories available to their physician and dentist colleagues.

Sincerely,

Alabama Veterinary Medical Association
Alaska Veterinary Medical Association
American Animal Hospital Association
American Association for Laboratory Animal Science
American Association of Avian Pathologists
American Association of Bovine Practitioners
American Association of Corporate and Public Practice Veterinarians
American Association of Equine Practitioners
American Association of Feline Practitioners
American Association of Food Hygiene Veterinarians
American Association of Retired Veterinarians
American Association of Small Ruminant Practitioners
American Association of Swine Veterinarians
American Association of Veterinary Clinicians
American Association of Veterinary Laboratory Diagnosticians
American Association of Wildlife Veterinarian
American College of Poultry Veterinarians
American College of Veterinary Pathologists
American Farm Bureau Federation
American Feed Industry Association
American Horse Council
American Meat Institute
American Registry of Professional Animal Scientists
American Society of Laboratory Animal Practitioners
American Veterinary Medical Association
Animal Agriculture Alliance
Animal Health Institute
Arizona Veterinary Medical Association
Arkansas Veterinary Medical Association
Association of American Veterinary Medical Colleges
Association of Avian Veterinarians
Bayer Healthcare, Animal Health Division
Boehringer Ingelheim Vetmedica, Inc.
California Veterinary Medical Association
Colorado Veterinary Medical Association
Colegio de Medicos Veterinarios de Puerto Rico (Puerto Rico Veterinary Medical Association)
Connecticut Veterinary Medical Association
Delaware Veterinary Medical Association
District of Columbia Veterinary Medical Association
Florida Veterinary Medical Association
Georgia Veterinary Medical Association
Hawaii Veterinary Medical Association
Idaho Veterinary Medical Association

Illinois State Veterinary Medical Association
Indiana Veterinary Medical Association
Institute of Food Technologists
Iowa Veterinary Medical Association
Kansas City Animal Health Advisory Board
Kansas Veterinary Medical Association
Kentucky Veterinary Medical Association
Louisiana Veterinary Medical Association
Maine Veterinary Medical Association
Maryland Veterinary Medical Association
Michigan Veterinary Medical Association
Minnesota Veterinary Medical Association
Mississippi Veterinary Medical Association
Missouri Veterinary Medical Association
Montana Veterinary Medical Association
National Association of Federal Veterinarians
National Milk Producers Federation
National Pork Producers Council
National Renderers Association
Nebraska Veterinary Medical Association
Nevada Veterinary Medical Association
New Hampshire Veterinary Medical Association
New Jersey Veterinary Medical Association
New Mexico Veterinary Medical Association
New York State Veterinary Medical Society
North Carolina Veterinary Medical Association
North Dakota Veterinary Medical Association
Novus International Inc.
Ohio Veterinary Medical Association
Oklahoma Veterinary Medical Association
Oregon Veterinary Medical Association
Pennsylvania Veterinary Medical Association
Rhode Island Veterinary Medical Association
Society for Theriogenology
South Carolina Association of Veterinarians
South Dakota Veterinary Medical Association
Student American Veterinary Medical Association
Synbiotics Corporation
Tennessee Veterinary Medical Association
Texas Veterinary Medical Association
U.S. Animal Health Association
Utah Veterinary Medical Association
Vermont Veterinary Medical Association
Virginia Veterinary Medical Association
Washington State Veterinary Medical Association
West Virginia Veterinary Medical Association
Wisconsin Veterinary Medical Association
Wyoming Veterinary Medical Association