

JAN 21 2026

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# A BILL FOR AN ACT

RELATING TO VETERINARIANS.

**BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF HAWAII:**

1       SECTION 1. The legislature finds that there is a critical  
2       need for more licensed veterinarians in the State. In 2020,  
3       there were three hundred twenty veterinarians working in Hawaii.  
4       However, the existing growth rate will not be sustainable to  
5       meet the current and future demand of veterinary services in the  
6       State, as the number of veterinarians is expected to grow only  
7       by approximately 1.6 per cent each year through 2030.

8       Presently, there are a myriad of issues that limit the  
9       potential to increase the number of licensed veterinarians in  
10      the State. For one, the State does not have a veterinary  
11      school, requiring individuals interested in pursuing a career in  
12      veterinary medicine to advance their education out-of-state,  
13      where many often remain after graduation. Without an  
14      educational option in Hawaii, veterinary graduates who do return  
15      to the State encounter financial barriers such as higher  
16      out-of-state tuition and relocation costs, higher costs of



1 living due to geographical isolation, and considerable student  
2 loan debt.

3       The legislature further finds that, in the United States,  
4 the pursuit of a doctor of veterinary medicine degree is a  
5 costly undertaking, with total program costs ranging from  
6 \$150,000 to \$400,000 for private out-of-state programs. Average  
7 program costs in the United States range from \$200,000 to  
8 \$275,000. The average graduate accumulates anywhere from  
9 \$150,000 to \$200,000 in student loan debt, with certain  
10 graduates accumulating more debt based on their chosen program.  
11 Therefore, it is imperative to incentivize current and future  
12 veterinarians to practice in the State by offering benefits to  
13 help lessen tuition burdens.

14       The legislature additionally finds that there are  
15 structural limitations within the State's veterinary education  
16 policy framework, contributing to a stunted workforce and  
17 highlighting the need for well-trained, highly qualified  
18 veterinary professionals in the State. Given the State's unique  
19 geography and resources, veterinarians must often adapt to a  
20 combination of geographical constraints such as inter-island  
21 travel, along with practical challenges associated with limited



1 specialty referrals, exotic species cases tied to endemic  
2 ecosystems, regulatory issues tied to import and export of  
3 animals and quarantine, and cultural sensitivities regarding  
4 animals in local communities. The role frequently demands  
5 flexibility, requiring that one may be called upon to assist in  
6 rural or remote clinics, serve in high-volume spay or neuter  
7 operations, participate in emergency or disaster-response  
8 animal-welfare efforts, or collaborate with wildlife agencies.

9       The legislature finds that the shortage of veterinary  
10 professionals in the State directly impacts and affects  
11 livestock health management, animal disease prevention, and  
12 emergency response frameworks, creating broader economic and  
13 biosecurity vulnerabilities. Without intervention, the State  
14 risks continued decline in veterinary service availability,  
15 compromising animal welfare, food security, and agricultural  
16 biosecurity. Offering prospective students and current  
17 veterinarians increased educational pathways and options within  
18 the State's veterinary educational framework will catalyze  
19 growth and expansion of the field of veterinary medicine,  
20 enhance the agricultural industry, move to address the shortage  
21 of veterinarians in the State, incentivize the interests of



1 individuals seeking entry into the profession, and assist  
2 qualified individuals who hold student debt.

3 Accordingly, the purpose of this Act is to:

4 (1) Establish the veterinary workforce development special  
5 fund;

6 (2) Establish the veterinary workforce development loan  
7 repayment and scholarship program to assist  
8 veterinarians in the State with loan repayments and  
9 completion of veterinary medicine education; and

10 (3) Increase the number of seats available to Hawaii  
11 residents interested in pursuing a doctor of  
12 veterinary medicine degree by authorizing the Hawaii  
13 board of veterinary medicine to enter into interstate  
14 partnerships and memoranda of agreement, in accordance  
15 with rules adopted pursuant to chapter 91, Hawaii  
16 Revised Statutes.

17 SECTION 2. Chapter 471, Hawaii Revised Statutes, is  
18 amended by adding three new sections to be appropriately  
19 designated and to read as follows:



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1        "§471-A    Veterinary workforce development special fund.

2        (a)    There is established the veterinary workforce development  
3        special fund, to be administered and expended by the board.

4        (b)    The following shall be deposited into the special  
5        fund:

6            (1)    Appropriations by the legislature;

7            (2)    Grants, donations, gifts, or other income received for  
8            the purposes of the special fund; and

9            (3)    Interest earned or accrued on moneys in the special  
10          fund.

11          (c)    Moneys in the special fund shall be used to support  
12          the veterinary workforce development loan repayment and  
13          scholarship program established pursuant to section 471-B;  
14          provided that the special fund shall be used for purposes  
15          identified by the board to support veterinary workforce  
16          assessment and planning efforts, including the recruitment and  
17          retention of veterinarians in the State. This shall include but  
18          not be limited to:

19            (1)    Maintaining accurate veterinarian workforce assessment  
20            information and providing or updating personal and  
21            professional information, which shall be maintained in



1           a secure database; provided that the board may  
2           disclose information specific to any veterinarian only  
3           with the express written consent of the veterinarian;

4           (2) Providing loan repayment to veterinarians who commit  
5           to working in shortage areas of the State as part of  
6           the veterinarian workforce loan repayment and  
7           scholarship program administered by the board; and

8           (3) Providing scholarships to qualifying veterinarians to  
9           be determined by the board.

10           **§471-B Veterinary workforce development loan repayment and**

11 **scholarship program.** (a) There is established a veterinary  
12 workforce development loan repayment and scholarship program to  
13 be administered by the board to provide financial support to  
14 veterinary students and practicing veterinarians who agree to  
15 work as a full-time veterinarian in shortage areas of the State  
16 for a period of time to be determined by the board.

17           (b) The veterinary workforce development loan repayment  
18 and scholarship program shall offer:

19           (1) Loan repayments to veterinarians who commit to working  
20           in shortage areas of the State for a minimum period of  
21           time determined by the board; and



1        (2) Scholarships to veterinary students attending  
2        veterinary colleges that meet standards established by  
3        the board; provided that the scholarship recipients  
4        commit to work in the State after graduation for a  
5        minimum period of time determined by the board.

6        (c) An individual who receives a loan repayment or  
7        scholarship pursuant to this section and does not work in the  
8        State for the minimum time period specified by the board shall  
9        repay the total amount of the loan or scholarship received to  
10       the veterinarian workforce development special fund; provided  
11       that the board may waive this requirement upon good cause shown.

12       (d) The board shall adopt rules in accordance with  
13       chapter 91 necessary to implement and administer the  
14       veterinarian workforce development loan repayment and  
15       scholarship program, including eligibility requirements and  
16       procedures.

17       **§471-C Veterinary education and training agreements.**

18       Beginning January 1, 2027, the board may enter into agreements,  
19       including a memorandum of understanding, with the university of  
20       Hawaii, Hawaii Veterinary Medical Association, and accredited  
21       out-of-state colleges of veterinary medicine to:



- 1        (1) Establish pathways for clinical training and joint  
2        clinical rotations in the State;
- 3        (2) Establish expedited licensure processes for graduates  
4        of approved partner programs;
- 5        (3) Authorize temporary practice permits for visiting  
6        faculty or clinicians providing clinical teaching or  
7        services in the State; and
- 8        (4) Facilitate interagency coordination to negotiate and  
9        operationalize partnerships and agreements with  
10       accredited out-of-state schools to increase the  
11       availability of program seats for residents in the  
12       State."

13       SECTION 3. No later than December 31, 2026, the Hawaii  
14 board of veterinary medicine shall adopt rules pursuant to  
15 chapter 91, Hawaii Revised Statutes, necessary to implement  
16 section 471-C, Hawaii Revised Statutes.

17       SECTION 4. There is appropriated out of the general  
18 revenues of the State of Hawaii the sum of \$                      or so  
19 much thereof as may be necessary for fiscal year 2026-2027 to be  
20 deposited into the veterinary workforce development special  
21 fund.





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SECTION 5. There is appropriated out of the veterinary workforce development special fund the sum of \$ or so much thereof as may be necessary for fiscal year 2026-2027 for scholarships and loan repayments to qualified individuals working as veterinarians in the State pursuant to the requirements of section 471-A, Hawaii Revised Statutes.

The sum appropriated shall be expended by the department of commerce and consumer affairs for the purposes of this Act.

SECTION 6. In codifying the new sections added by section 2 of this Act, the revisor of statutes shall substitute appropriate section numbers for the letters used in designating the new sections in this Act.

SECTION 7. New statutory material is underscored.

SECTION 8. This Act shall take effect on July 1, 2026.

INTRODUCED BY: *Keith M. R. [Signature]*



# S.B. NO. 2158

**Report Title:**

Board of Veterinary Medicine; Veterinarian Workforce Development Special Fund; Scholarships; Loan Repayment; Interstate Partnerships; Memoranda of Understanding; Appropriation

**Description:**

Establishes the Veterinarian Workforce Development Special Fund. Establishes the Veterinarian Workforce Development Loan Repayment and Scholarship Program to support qualified veterinarians committed to or currently working in veterinary medicine in the State. Authorizes the Hawaii Board of Veterinary Medicine to enter into agreements, including memoranda of understanding, with the University of Hawaii, the Hawaii Veterinary Medical Association, and accredited out-of-state schools to increase the availability of accredited veterinary programs and licensure opportunities to residents of the State. Appropriates funds.

*The summary description of legislation appearing on this page is for informational purposes only and is not legislation or evidence of legislative intent.*

