

JAN 21 2026

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:



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 **S471-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.



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

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

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

13 SECTION 7. New statutory material is underscored.

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

15

INTRODUCED BY: Mark W. Parker Jr.



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.

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