

## Getting to the Bottom of the Veterinary Technician Shortage in Minnesota

### “Advocacy for the Veterinary Technician Workforce Enhancement Act”

By Dr. Al Balay, Chair, MVMA Veterinary Technician Committee

In this article, #13 in the series, we share an update of where we are in preparation for the 2023 legislative session. As mentioned in the previous article, the MVMA lobbyists are setting up clinic visits with key legislators. The first visit occurred in late July with most visits to be scheduled in the fall. These visits are an opportunity to inform legislators about the shortage of both veterinarians and veterinary technicians. The visits are also an opportunity to advocate for the technician licensure initiative and the entire veterinary team. Included in this article is information about the Veterinary Technician Workforce Enhancement Act, an introduction to the new MAVT Executive Director, and information about advocacy with legislators.

One of the major goals of the LVT initiative is to assist with **retaining** veterinary technicians in the profession. We feel that providing an opportunity for licensure will be a great first step in advancing the careers of these individuals and elevating their role in the veterinary health care team. The following are the Key Components of the Bill directly from the MVMA website:

- Certified veterinary technicians currently in good standing with the MVMA are immediately eligible for licensure.
- Non-certified veterinary technicians would be eligible to apply if they are currently practicing, performed 4160 hours of experience (within the previous 5 years), and have a letter of recommendation from a licensed veterinarian stating their competency.
- With regulated credentialing, Licensed Veterinary Technicians (LVTs) will aid in the purpose to protect the health and safety of the public and animal patients in the state of Minnesota.
  - Properly trained veterinary team members impact many areas including: infectious diseases, zoonotic diseases, ensuring food and feed safety, and animal control and injury protection.
  - Properly trained veterinary team members ensure functional health in companion animals, service and working animals, as well as livestock and research animals.
- Upon licensure, the role of veterinary technicians in patient care will be better defined while remaining under the supervision of a licensed veterinarian.
- With licensure, veterinary technicians will be able to provide direct supervision to veterinary assistants and other unlicensed employees of tasks delegated by the licensed veterinarian.
- Veterinary team members not eligible for licensure or choosing not to be licensed will be called veterinary assistants.
- Licensure also ensures veterinary technicians are familiar with and understand the state's laws and regulations governing their profession.
- MN Board of Veterinary Medicine shall oversee and establish licensure requirements.

Heidi Holste is the Executive Director of the Minnesota Association of Veterinary Technicians and has been in her role since May 2022. For 20 years, Heidi has worked in advocacy and public policy as a legislative assistant, lobbyist, and as an executive director of a service-based organization. Heidi has been participating in the regularly scheduled meetings with those of us working on the veterinary technician initiative. Recently Heidi shared with us some points about the importance of advocacy. She started her information with the following quote: *“I always wondered why somebody doesn't do something about that. Then I realized that I was somebody.”* Lily Tomlin

Heidi then shares the following points about advocacy and what can you do?

**Tell your own story.** It is up to you tell your own experience before someone else tells it for you. Tell elected officials and policy makers why you work with animals. Each of us who works with animals for some of the same reasons but also for different reasons. What makes you get up every day and do what you do? What is your why?

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**Turn your passion and motivation into action.** Legislators play such a large role in what we do, it is important to turn your motivation and passion for what you do into action and make contacting your own legislator a priority. If legislators do not know our needs, they cannot help. There are many narratives out there, make sure they hear your voice! And, if you can educate even one legislator, we are on the right path.

**Advocacy Engagement can be catching.** Once you do this, you may find that you will motivate others to do it as well. We are not asking that you become an expert on all the issues, only simply, that you are an expert in what you do, and the way you think.

Additional thoughts about turning your ideas and voice into action:

- Legislators make the decisions on your livelihood, funding, and regulations.
- Consider advocacy engagement as marketing for you.
- Think of legislators as a family member or client, they are human after all.
- You do not have to take a political stand; you simply share your concerns and needs.
- You tell your own story, instead of others telling it for you -- leave your lawmaker with an impression of what you do and what you need.
- You want to be on a lawmaker's speed-dial when issues come up that impact you and what they will be voting on.

For more information, please check out the [MVMA website](#) under the veterinary technician licensure tab. Our contact information is there if you have any questions.

