

Not Surprised and Not Defeated: “Veterinary Technician Workforce Enhancement Act”

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

In this article, #12 in the series, we share a short update of where we are in the legislative process and how we prepare for the next legislative session. During the 2021 legislative session, the MVMA Veterinary Technician Committee introduced legislation proposing licensure of Veterinary Technicians in the Minnesota House and Senate in February 2022. The bills did not make it into committee hearings in either legislative chamber. We were not surprised and certainly not defeated. We've learned a lot about the legislative process.

In April, we met with the MVMA Lobbyist, Cullen Sheehan, and some of his associates. Cullen and his team have developed a three-phase strategy to reintroduce bills in both the House and Senate in 2023. All Minnesota legislators will be up for re-election in 2022 so we know that there will likely be changes in committee structure and leadership. Cullen has identified 32 legislators that he believes will be key next year. The single most important strategy for phase one will be to meet with these legislators between now and election day to educate and make sure that they understand the issue, gain their support, and possibly use them as authors and/or co-authors for a new bill. MVMA staff are identifying clinics in the districts of these key legislators so that coffee or clinic visits can be set up. Likely, these visits will take place from late summer until election day. Ideally, Kim Horne and/or Al Balay would be available to support you and will attempt to attend these meetings with local constituents (veterinarians or veterinary technicians) from these clinics during the visits. Alternatively, we will likely create a short infomercial video so that anyone meeting with their legislator has the key points to share. Phase two will occur immediately after election day in November until early at the beginning of the next legislative session. This will be a time to meet with key legislative committee chairs and members. Phase three is preparing in advance to be ready for committee questionnaires and hearings once the legislators are in session.

This summer we are meeting with several groups and with the MN Board of Veterinary Medicine (BVM) to refine language in the current bills. We know that when legislation passes and is signed by the Governor, the BVM will need 18 – 24 months to create rules and get the infrastructure set up for licensure. We

are working with groups and getting a great deal of input regarding a suggested length of time for sunset of a grandfathering clause. The MVMA Veterinary Technician Committee suggested a two-year sunset. Considering the amount of time for the BVM to prepare for licensing technicians and this sunset, that would be a period of four years before licensure would become norm. Some groups have suggested that we consider a longer sunset. It is important to understand that ultimately the grandfather clause criteria and length of sunset is up to the legislators.

We are collecting letters of support for the legislative initiative and have already gotten a number of letters from important groups including AVMA, NAVTA, CVM, and VMC as well as others. We also anticipate working with the veterinary technician programs at the four Minnesota colleges and the program at Northland Technical College in Wisconsin to keep the students informed of the current certification process and the likelihood of future licensure.

Last, I'd recommend an article in the AAHA Newstat® from March 2022, titled “And you thought we don't have enough vets now...”. The article reports highlights from three studies released from Mars Veterinary Health conducted by Dr. Jim Lloyd, a senior consultant at Animal Health Economics. In the article, it is predicted that the US will need close to 41,000 more veterinarians by 2030 due to retirement and other factors. With the projections of graduates from current veterinary colleges, the estimate is that “the profession will fall short of that goal by about 15,000 veterinarians”. A key point for us to consider is that Dr. Lloyd discussed ways to meet the shortfall including “more complete development of the roles and contributions of veterinary technicians and a more thorough professional engagement of the entire health care team”.

<https://www.aaha.org/publications/newstat/articles/2022-03/and-you-think-we-dont-have-enough-vets-now-.->

One of the 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.