

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

# “Preparing for the 2023 Legislative Session”

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

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In this article, #14 in the series, we share an update of how we are preparing for the 2023 legislative session. We've been working with several people to revise the bill for introduction in January. I want to share the status of enrollments at the various technician programs as well as emphasize why we continue to move forward on this initiative. The licensure initiative has the ongoing leadership support of both MVMA and MAVT.

We have made some revisions to the bill and this will need to go to the Minnesota Revisor's Office to be used in both the House of Representatives and the Senate when the session convenes in January. If you have suggestions for the bill draft, we encourage you to contact us now. You can find the previous bill (House File #2553 and Senate File # 2935) on the MVMA website.

We have been frequently asked why MVMA and MAVT haven't put more emphasis on pushing to start more veterinary technology teaching programs in Minnesota. At the MVMA Veterinary Technician Committee meeting in September 2022, each of the four colleges in Minnesota (Dakota County Technical College, Minnesota North College – previously Vermillion Community College, Ridgewater College, and Rochester Community and Technical College) as well as Northwood Technical College in New Richmond, Wisconsin were represented. All the colleges were asked if they were maxed on enrollments and the status of the college's waiting list to attend the veterinary technology program. The Minnesota colleges did not report max enrollments or waiting lists. The committee feels that we may not need more veterinary technology programs at this time and instead that we must work on strategies to retain veterinary technicians in the career.

One of the major goals of the veterinary technician licensure initiative is to assist with retaining technicians in the profession. We feel that providing an opportunity for licensure will be a great first step in advancing the careers, improving utilization of technicians' skills, and elevating their role in the veterinary health care team. Within the initiative is wording to allow licensed veterinary technicians to supervise unlicensed employees and thereby increase practice efficiency and potentially help alleviate the future predicted shortage of veterinarians. Protecting the title of veterinary technicians will improve public understanding of the entire veterinary health care team, recognize technicians for their education and skillset, and improve public safety for animals. Increased continuing education requirements as proposed in the initiative will also lead to better care of animals. Veterinary Technicians will be licensed and regulated through the Board of Veterinary Medicine. The current certification that is managed through the MVMA does not hold technicians accountable.

There has been a great deal of angst and concern from veterinarians and technicians about the marketing by the Animal Humane Society of its in-house, seven month “veterinary technician” training program. The Animal Humane Society certainly has the right to utilize a formalized training program for its staff. Those expressing concerns and even outrage about this program feel that it is a great disservice to college educated veterinary technicians as well as confusing to the public that may assume that seven months of education is all that is required for a veterinary technician. The Humane Society has been strongly encouraged to use the widely accepted nomenclature from AVMA and to title the in-house program more appropriately as a “veterinary assistant” training program. It is crucial to state that the Animal Humane Society has a disclaimer for potential students in which they state that students in this program will not be qualified for certification.

The MVMA Board as well as the MAVT Board and the National Association of Veterinary Technicians (NAVTA) have issued letters to the Animal Humane Society expressing dissatisfaction with the program name and stating it is confusing to the public.

For more information about the veterinary technician licensure initiative, please check out the MVMA website under the veterinary technician licensure tab. Our contact information is there if you have any questions.