

**Written Testimony in Support of House Bill 2605
to the Senate Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources
by Dr. Andy Hawkins, Assistant Animal Health Commissioner
Kansas Department of Agriculture
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Good morning, Chairman Kerschen and members of the committee. I am Andy Hawkins and I serve as the Assistant Animal Health Commissioner of the Kansas Department of Agriculture (KDA). Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony in support of House Bill 2605.

K.S.A. 74-576(c) directs the Secretary of Agriculture to “foster and promote the development and economic welfare of the agricultural industry of the state.” Recognizing the key role that animal agriculture plays in the Kansas economy, KDA supports House Bill 2605 which provides important updates to the Veterinary Training Program for Rural Kansas (VTPRK). The program, established in 2006 by the Kansas legislature, has served 80 students and has been a successful tool in recruiting students to rural Kansas.

The VTPRK program offers financial assistance to students who attend Kansas State University College of Veterinary Medicine and commit to practicing in a rural area of Kansas. In addition to financial support, the program also ensures that students practicing in rural Kansas have training and experiences necessary to successfully own and operate a veterinary practice in rural Kansas. This program continues to be a critical economic development tool for rural Kansas serving one of the largest sectors of our industry, livestock production. A survey conducted by Kansas State University College of Veterinary Medicine revealed that nearly 60% of producers said there is a shortage of rural veterinarians. In order to allow the animal agriculture economy to continue growing, we must have a plan to overcome this shortage, and the VTPRK program is designed to help increase and maintain the number of rural veterinarians in Kansas.

Since its inception, the VTPRK program has continued to attract recent veterinary graduates to establish practice in rural Kansas. To date, over 94% of VTPRK graduates remain in a qualifying county, undoubtedly providing a profound impact on Kansas agriculture. The time has come to make updates to the program so it will continue to be a relevant and effective program for supporting Kansas veterinary medical students who are willing to return to rural Kansas to focus on food animal practice. Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of House Bill 2605. KDA believes that passage of this bill will provide the necessary enhancements to the Veterinary Training Program for Rural Kansas, ensuring that future veterinarians will practice in rural Kansas.