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December 17, 2024

Senator Robert Stivers, President of the Senate
Kentucky General Assembly
700 Capital Avenue
Frankfort, KY 40601

Representative David Osborne, Speaker of the House
Kentucky General Assembly
700 Capital Avenue
Frankfort, KY 40601

Senator Jason Howell, Chairman of Senate Agriculture
Kentucky General Assembly
702 Capital Avenue
Frankfort, KY 40601

Representative Richard Heath, Chairman of House Agriculture
Kentucky General Assembly
702 Capital Avenue
Frankfort, KY 50601

Dear President Stivers, Speaker Osborne, Chairman Howell and Chairman Heath,

As Judge Executive of Webster County and Chairman of the Green River Area Development District (GRADD), I am submitting this letter in full support of Murray State University (MSU) having the statutory authority to offer a Doctorate in Veterinary Medicine.

For over fifty years, Murray State University has tried to establish a School of Veterinary Medicine. Yet, the need for large animal veterinarians – particularly in rural Kentucky - has increased dramatically year after year, decade after decade and our solution to the problem as a state has been to farm out contract spaces for veterinary school in other states.

In Webster County, we do not have access to a sufficient number of veterinarians and continue to experience a tremendous shortage of veterinarians in general. So much so, that it is causing animal care issues with our Webster County Animal Shelter.

I do not understand the opposition any interest group or legislator could have regarding Murray State University offering doctorates in veterinary medicine. The need for more veterinarians is obviously there – this has been identified by the Kentucky Department of Agriculture in 2023 when a Kentucky Veterinary Shortage Work Group was created. Even recently, the American Association of Veterinary Medical Colleges (AAVMC) published a study looking at the supply and demand for new veterinary colleges, citing the growing need for veterinarians in the United

States. The AAVMC study said they will need at least 1600 additional seats by early in the next decade to keep up with demand and retirements in the field. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) has also identified 86 out of 120 counties in Kentucky as currently experiencing a tremendous veterinarian shortage.

Some have said that they are against the distributive model that Murray State University is proposing, citing that it is simply a cost-effective model of veterinary medical education. The General Assembly daily asks Kentucky counties, cities, public universities and other public entities to provide a public service, but do it in as cost-efficient manner as possible, without sacrificing the quality we expect as Kentuckians. That is exactly what a distributive model veterinary school is and would be at Murray State University. All veterinarians, no matter where trained, take the same test in order to practice veterinary medicine. When we go to the doctor's office for human medicine, we don't ask the doctor whether he went to Harvard Medical School or Pikeville Medical School or to the University of Louisville. We just want good human healthcare. As a state, we should take the same approach with animal healthcare.

A new College of Veterinary Medicine at Murray State University would also be a tremendous economic development boom for our region and state, with students both coming from in state and out of state to our region to live, work and attend college.

I applaud Murray State University for stepping up continuously for five decades to try to help the Commonwealth in meeting a need for more large animal veterinarians and fully support the statutory barrier of KRS 164.295 being altered to allow them to offer a Doctorate in Veterinary Medicine.

With the MSU Breathitt Veterinary Center – a veterinary diagnostic laboratory in Christian County with the highest safety designation in Kentucky by the USDA – as well as having the largest enrollment of Pre-Veterinary Medicine and Veterinary Technology students in the state, along with MSU's longstanding tradition of excellence in animal agriculture make Murray State University the ideal place to locate a future veterinary school.

Thank you for your leadership in our state and for your continued support of both Webster County and Murray State University. I would request that this letter be read and included in the minutes at Thursday's Interim Joint Committee on Agriculture and also shared with the Interim Joint Committee on Education, as well as with members of House and Senate Leadership. Please let me know if I may ever be of assistance to you on this issue or any issue involving Webster County.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Stephen R. Henry". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Stephen" being the most prominent.

Steve Henry
Webster County Judge Executive