

INTERIM JOINT COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE

Minutes of the 7th Meeting of the 2024 Interim

December 19, 2024

Call to Order and Roll Call

The 7th meeting of the Interim Joint Committee on Agriculture was held on December 19, 2024, at 1:00 PM in Room 154 of the Capitol Annex. Representative Richard Heath, Chair, called the meeting to order, and the secretary called the roll.

Present were:

Members: Representative Richard Heath, Co-Chair; Senator Jason Howell, Co-Chair; Senators Cassie Chambers Armstrong, Gary Boswell, Matthew Deneen, David P. Givens, Damon Thayer, Robin L. Webb, and Stephen West; Representatives Chad Aull, Mike Clines, Daniel Fister, Derrick Graham, David Hale, Mark Hart, Kim King, Matthew Koch, Shawn McPherson, Amy Neighbors, Michael Sarge Pollock, Phillip Pratt, Sarah Stalker, Cherlynn Stevenson, Nancy Tate, Walker Thomas, and James Tipton.

Guests: Scott Friedman, Principal, Deloitte; Amy Wittmayer, Specialist Leader, Deloitte; Dr. Aaron Thompson, President, Council on Post Secondary Education; Bob Jackson, President, Murray State University; Jordan Smith, Assistant VP of Public Affairs, Murray State University; and Brian Parr, Dean of the Hutson School of Agriculture, Murray State University.

LRC Staff: Stefan Kasacavage, Hillary Abbott, Kelly Ludwig, and Susan Spoonamore.

Approval of November 7, 2024 minutes

The November 7, 2024, minutes were approved, without objection, upon motion made by Representative Fister and seconded by Representative McPherson.

Report of Findings from 2024 RS SJR 170, relating to a veterinary school at a Kentucky comprehensive university

Dr. Aaron Thompson, President, Council on Postsecondary Education (CPE), discussed 2024 RS SJR 170 as it related to Murray State's feasibility study regarding a doctoral program for professional practice and licensure in veterinary medicine. If the program is approved, there would still be a program approval and review process through CPE.

Amy Wittmayer, Specialist Leader, Deloitte, said Deloitte was tasked to perform a feasibility assessment of the proposed doctoral program for professional practice and licensure in veterinary medicine at Murray State University (MSU). Scott Friedman, Principal, Deloitte,

Committee meeting materials may be accessed online at <https://apps.legislature.ky.gov/CommitteeDocuments/261>

said Deloitte met with leadership at MSU to understand the goals, vision, and plans for the proposed veterinary school. They also talked with a diverse set of stakeholders outside of MSU to develop a holistic and comprehensive assessment and to outline likely benefits and risks. Per the requirements of SJR 170, Deloitte looked at MSU's financial performance, sufficiency of research facilities, and performance on student success outcomes. Mr. Friedman said the assessment also looked into student demand for the program, industry experts' opinions, faculty recruitment, accreditation standards, clinical placements, and cost-benefit analysis.

Ms. Wittmayer highlighted there were few, if any, concerns regarding MSU's financial health, student success, or research infrastructure. She noted the cost of a College of Veterinary Medicine (CVM) could exceed \$13 million per year. Workforce alignment indicated feasibility risks due to concerns that the proposed CVM was not the best solution for addressing the shortage of rural large animal veterinarians in Kentucky. She said historical data and industry experts refute claims that a new in-state veterinary school could eliminate the shortage. Ms. Wittmayer stated veterinary experts said lack of incentives is the greatest contributor to rural veterinarian shortages in Kentucky and nationally. In 2023, the average debt for a new Doctor of Veterinary Medicine (DVM) graduate was approximately \$154,451. She estimated MSU would need to hire approximately 15 faculty members at a salary range that exceeds the current average faculty salary. Due to a national shortage of veterinary faculty, MSU could struggle to attract candidates. To meet accreditation standards, MSU would need to invest significantly to provide facilities for housing of animals used in teaching and quality research. CVMs using the distributive model of clinical education do not have teaching hospitals. Instead, the CVMs send students throughout the state or country to receive clinical training. MSU's proposed distributive model would require an extensive partner network as well as investments in faculty and staff, technology, and payments to clinical partners.

In response to Representative Tipton, Ms. Wittmayer stated there are 15 additional veterinary schools throughout the US in planning or development stages of accreditation. Representative Tipton asked if schools who use the distributive model are able to receive accreditation. Ms. Wittmayer said the report did not cover that information.

In response to Senator Givens, Mr. Friedman said, due to the scope of their research, Deloitte did not look at future changes to CVM programs. In the future, Dr. Thompson stated there could be changes, including veterinary nurses, veterinarian technicians, and veterinarian assistants.

In response to Representative Stevenson, Ms. Wittmayer stated MSU anticipates using the ten faculty members currently teaching vet tech students to support the CVM.

Aside from creating financial incentives, Dr. Thompson stated we need to create a reason for graduates to stay in Kentucky.

Comments from Murray State University regarding a potential veterinary school

Bob Jackson, President, MSU, stated the Deloitte study is positive but there were items that MSU disagreed with. MSU has been successful in placing graduates in rural areas. He said MSU has a strong foundation upon which to build a new CVM, including strong financials, existing facilities, and expertise in animal sciences. In 2032, there will be a need for 7,092 veterinarians in the United States. He highlighted that an MSU alumni gifted MSU approximately \$4.5 million to enhance the Hutson School of Agriculture. Those funds will be used to focus on large animal veterinarians and as incentive money to practice in rural Kentucky. In the past 45 years, five of the six new CVMs utilized the same model MSU is proposing. Dr. Brian Parr, Dean of the Hutson School of Agriculture, said MSU's agriculture farms and programs would share resources at the CVM. In order for students to return to rural Kentucky to practice veterinary medicine, he said the students need to come from rural Kentucky.

Senator Thayer stated he has concerns given the large numbers of veterinarians who are against MSU establishing a CVM. He questioned why the University of Kentucky (UK) is not asking for a CVM, and if a CVM would address the shortage of large animals veterinarians. He asked Mr. Jackson to justify the taxpayer expense to support MSU's desire to have a CVM. Mr. Jackson said not all veterinarians are opposed and his understanding is UK is taking a neutral position.

In response to Representative Tipton Mr. Jackson said MSU would require an additional \$30 million to finance the start-up costs. Dr. Parr added the accreditation process is outlined by the American Veterinary Medical Association.

Representative Stevenson expressed concerns about the licensure exam pass rate and MSU's ability to hire faculty. Dr. Parr said MSU has ten faculty members who could become part of the CVM. He said licensure exam pass rates for the license vet tech program cannot be compared to a veterinary program pass rate. Representative Stevenson said there is concern that the \$90 million estimate may not be a one-time expenditure.

Debra Shoulders, Veterinarian, Phil Prater, Veterinarian, James Beckman, Veterinarian, and Jen Quammen, Veterinarian, spoke against the use of the distributive model for MSU's CVM.

Mr. Jackson said that the greatest need today is not having enough veterinarians to cover large animals. He said MSU supports Auburn University's Veterinary School's slots for Kentucky students but there are only so many slots available.

Representative Hale stated his veterinarian also opposed the distributive model.

Adjournment

With no further business, the meeting adjourned.