



KVMA

108 Consumer Lane* Frankfort, KY 40601

502-226-5862 (KVMA)

E-mail- info@kvma.org * Website- www.kvma.org

February 5, 2025

The Kentucky Veterinary Medical Association (KVMA) opposes the proposal of a distributive model veterinary school to be located at Murray State University. KVMA conducted a survey of our membership which compelled the KVMA Executive Board to write this letter of concern. A distributive model refers to a program where veterinary students will complete the last year of their education at multiple offsite locations rather than at a single campus. This education change could have a drastic impact on the quality of veterinarians available to meet the needs of Kentucky. The following points support our concerns regarding viability and sustainability of the proposed distributive veterinary school model.

Quality of Education: The most significant concern is whether Murray State can provide the necessary resources, facilities, and faculty to deliver a high-quality veterinary education. Currently, Murray State's long established veterinary technician school has a 3-year Veterinary Technician National Exam ([VTNE](#)) pass rate of 57.6%. This pass rate is much lower than other established CVTEA-accredited schools in Kentucky ([Morehead 82%](#) and [Owensboro 75%](#)) should give one pause on whether Murray State will be able to provide an educational program that meets and exceeds the [AVMA Council of Education \(COE\) accreditation](#) standard of 80% or higher on the North American Veterinary Licensing Examination (NAVLE).

Faculty Support: The AVMA COE has very strict standards for qualifications of all faculty that teach in veterinary colleges. There are several research papers currently describing the intense shortage of board-certified specialists that are available to teach in established veterinary colleges, let alone programs that are not even in the accreditation pipeline. Currently, per AVMA there are 774 openings for faculty on their respective job boards at North American College of Veterinary Medicine campuses. The *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association* has written [several articles](#) on the lack of faculty. While a distributive model requires fewer clinicians during the clinical year, students will still need support from a broad group of faculty members while learning the foundations of veterinary medicine between years 1 through 3. **What Murray State is currently proposing would be the lowest staffed and lowest funded veterinary school in the country.**

Financial Sustainability: The KVMA has questioned the financial feasibility of the program. Opening a veterinary school is a significant financial commitment, and there are concerns about how Murray State would fund the school in the long term, particularly in a state with a relatively smaller population compared to other regions with established veterinary schools. Murray State claims that they will be financially solvent and will not need to ask the General Assembly for additional funding. The primary sources of income for a veterinary school are the following:

Veterinary Clinical Hospital income

University Subsidies

State Appropriations

Tuition

Murray State reports they will be self-funded on tuition alone with tuition lower than the rate offered by Auburn CVM. No other accredited, distributive model school is self-funded and provides a tuition rate similar to our current contract seats.

KVMA is apprehensive that without a clear and sustainable funding model, the program may struggle financially in the long term. Such a program requires significant coordination and infrastructure to manage multiple locations, which can increase operational costs and complexity. Even without the costs of operating a teaching hospital, Murray State will still have significant costs during a student's final year as off-campus clinical sites will need to be compensated for each rotation they host a student.

Multispecies Profession: Contrary to Murry State's proposal, a college of veterinary medicine may not focus on any one or a small group of species, such as cattle or livestock. The AVMA COE has requirements that all students follow a broad-based, multi-species clinical experience. Veterinarians may specialize in particular species after graduation, but to earn a doctorate as a veterinarian students must master specialized clinical training in all disciplines including internal medicine, surgery, preventative medicine, and exotics. Although there are some practices that might offer general, mixed species training, there will be few who can offer the expertise required to teach students this proficiency. Many general practices are not set up to handle the highly specialized training curriculum for full accreditation.

Limited Clinical Opportunities: A distributive model requires a strong network of partner locations for clinical training. Each veterinary practice will need to meet strict criteria from AVMA COE to offer their practice as a clinical teaching site. There are few practices in Kentucky that could accept more than one student at a time and meet the ratios and educational quality required by the COE, and KVMA is concerned that there may not be enough established veterinary practices resulting in the veterinary students need to find training outside of the state.

Veterinary education requires extensive hands-on clinical experience. A distributive model may make it challenging to ensure that students have access to a diverse range of clinical cases and veterinary specialties particularly given Kentucky's rural demographics. Murray State must analyze the question – Will there be enough practices to sustainably meet the needs of each clinical year?

Impact on Existing Veterinary Practices: The distributive model will place a strain on veterinarians in Kentucky. KVMA is concerned that local veterinarians could face additional burdens educating students- stressing current resources and decreasing the quality of services provided to existing clients. Dr. Tammy Smith of Knox County Veterinary Services has taught distributive students for the past 6 years, and states, "After speaking with over 30 veterinary students completing rotations with us during their senior year, the extraneous stress placed on these students as compared to those in a traditional, on campus, setting is astounding. Asking a student to move, and in essence start a new job every 4 weeks while at the same time expecting them to learn and hone their professional skills is simply too much. This is exemplified by lower NAVLE scores. Likewise, to the practitioner taking these students under their wings for those 4-week rotations is not 'free help' as some have naively touted it, but rather it's a charitable passing of the baton as we simultaneously try to provide the best care to our clients. We are Practitioners, not Professors. Neither party wins in these circumstances."

Veterinary School Facilities: Murray State's proposal suggests their intent to house the school of veterinary medicine within the MSU School of Agriculture, touting MSU farms, herds, and the Breathitt Veterinary Center. However, AVMA COE standards require that a school of veterinary medicine must be an autonomous academic entity with its own Dean, who must be a veterinarian, with status equivalent to that of Deans of other university academic divisions.

Addressing Rural Veterinary Shortages: After the 18-month [Veterinary Shortage Working Group](#) with over 20 commodity groups in Kentucky the most immediate finding was a student loan repayment program, which was the most efficient way to address the rural vote shortage. Nowhere in the report was it found building a veterinary school would solve this issue. KVMA championed [HB553](#) the [Kentucky Veterinary Loan Repayment Program \(KVLRP\)](#) in 2024 and it successfully passed into law. It has been proven that building a veterinary school in an agricultural state will not reduce the rural veterinary shortage. If so, there would not be over 25 student loan programs in predominantly agricultural states with most having a traditional veterinary school with 6 bills filed from additional states

It is proven that it is a student debt to potential income earned in rural areas is what keeps veterinarians from being employed in rural areas. The KVLRP will help ease this ongoing issue.

In summary, KVMA hopes all Kentuckians will take these fact-based concerns seriously. One may think of their veterinarians as those that care for our beloved companion animals, but it would serve us well to remember veterinarians are critical to the multibillion-dollar equine and agricultural industries in Kentucky and the protection of public health from zoonotic diseases. The current mode of educating veterinarians in our state through contract spaces at established, accredited, world renowned traditional veterinary schools is time-honored and has been highly effective. To trade this method for a proposed veterinary school with an unproven record may have a profoundly negative effect on the quality of the veterinary profession in our state.

Respectfully,



Wade King, DVM – KVMA President



James M. Weber, DVM, MBA - Governmental Relations Committee Chair



Debra Hamelback – KVMA Executive Director

The KVMA Executive Board

The mission of the Kentucky Veterinary Medical Association is to promote, protect, and improve the veterinary profession. The KVMA membership represents 1441 (87%) of resident veterinarians in the state of Kentucky.