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**Testimony of Beth W. Carlson, DVM
Deputy State Veterinarian
Senate Bill 2003
House Appropriations Committee-Education and Environment Division
Sakakawea Room
March 2, 2009**

Chairman Skarphol and members of the Appropriations Committee, I am Deputy State Veterinarian Beth Carlson. I am here today on behalf of the North Dakota Department of Agriculture and the State Board of Animal Health in support of the portion of SB 2003 pertaining to funding for the Professional Student Exchange Program (PSEP) and the Kansas State Program. As you are aware, the PSEP program assists North Dakota students enrolled in professional programs not offered in the state of North Dakota, including optometry, dentistry, and of greatest importance to agriculture, veterinary medicine. The recent implementation of the Kansas State funding has provided an additional avenue to train food animal veterinarians, and we look forward to the graduation of the first group of students selected for this program in May of this year.

The State Board of Animal Health is responsible for protecting the health of the domestic animals and non-traditional livestock of the state. We cannot do this without the assistance of a strong group of practicing veterinarians and regulatory veterinarians. Accredited veterinarians issue health certificates, perform regulatory testing, provide services to auction markets, and occasionally assist the Board with other matters.

Rising tuition costs (and, as a result, student loan debt) make it difficult for students who wish to return to North Dakota to do so. Some students who are accepted to veterinary school may choose not to attend and instead pursue another career, rather than incur huge debt loads. This has contributed to the shortage of veterinarians in the state. In the recent past, two of the largest auction markets in the state have had great difficulty contracting a veterinarian to provide services. When the Board needs to contract with a practicing veterinarian, it is sometimes difficult to find one who is available. I personally was a recipient of Professional Student Exchange funds, and it kept my student loans to a manageable level, which allowed me to choose to return to serve North Dakota, first in private practice and now in the public sector.

Chairman Skarphol and committee members, for these reasons, I support these portions of SB 2003. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.