

May 6th, 2021

Eraina Ortega
Director, CalHR
1515 S Street
Sacramento, CA 95811

Dear Director Ortega,

California's recent Public Service Recognition Week, while appreciated, served as a reminder of the persistent compensation discrepancies state-employed veterinarians in Bargaining Unit 10 continue to face. Prior to 2005, veterinarians employed by California state agencies had been compensated at or above engineers and PhD's, reflecting the value the state had placed on our level of education, expertise, and professionalism. Recently, an Environmental Program Manager (EPM) commented that the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) veterinarians they had worked with regularly operate at a level most like an EPM, seemingly confirming the value we strive for as public servants. Yet veterinarians are compensated significantly less than State Engineers, Senior ES Supervisors, and Research Scientist IV's, despite similar, and sometimes greater, training, expertise, and professional responsibilities. The persistent pay discrepancy, the almost 10% pay reduction that continues even today, and the denied 5% increase obtained through collective bargaining, weigh heavily on this dedicated, highly educated, and professional group of state employees.

The practice of veterinary medicine is a specialty, akin to the professions of law, dentistry, and human medicine. Veterinary medicine has the most competitive process of candidate selection of any profession and maintains the same high expectations of professional practice and conduct standards as associated fields. As a profession, veterinary medicine is regularly ranked as most trusted by the public. Training and education for the Doctor of Veterinary Medicine (DVM) is analogous to that of a Medical Doctor (MD), with a notable difference: veterinarians train to handle, diagnose, and treat many different species, not just one. To legally practice veterinary medicine, we must first pass separate, rigorous state and national examinations covering all the diverse topics in veterinary medicine. To maintain California state licensure, we must complete a minimum of 36 hours of continuing education bi-annually.

All CDFW's veterinarians, and many veterinarians working in other state agencies, have one or more graduate degrees (MS, MPH, MPVM, PhD), board certifications, licensures, or accreditations *in addition* to our doctorate (DVM) degree and veterinary license. Each come at an additional expense, both in time and money, often extending the already staggering educational debt that many veterinarians face (new graduates in 2019 averaged >\$183,000 in school loans). Additional licensure, certifications, and accreditations, often requirements for employment by the State, include Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) licensure to order and manage DEA-scheduled drugs (such as fentanyl and ketamine), U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) accreditation for animal health inspections for inter-state and international animal imports and exports, and USDA Foreign Animal Disease Diagnostician (FADD) training and certification for front-line response to detect and respond to foreign animal disease outbreaks. These additional licensures, certifications, and accreditations highlight the exceptional professional and personal standards, the extensive in-depth veterinary knowledge, the regulatory responsibilities, and the added liabilities that come with practicing veterinary medicine for the State, extending well beyond those of the average rank and file employee.

State veterinarians must complete complex and timely animal health investigations and scientific research as part of our regular job duties. This includes preparation and rapid response to emerging and exotic animal and zoonotic diseases, critical policy questions, mass-mortality events, animal-related crimes, and complex sociopolitical issues involving both population and individual animal health concerns for California's livestock, pets, and threatened and endangered species. In 2020 alone, California's veterinarians prepared for and responded to animal and zoonotic diseases such as COVID-19, African swine fever, lactococcosis septicemia of fish, and rabbit hemorrhagic disease. We may be required to testify in court as animal health professionals, review and edit draft legislation, or present educational materials to state policymakers. We lead statewide projects and provide significant leadership, expertise, and supervision to state scientists, supervisors, and Department Executives alike. Veterinarians serve as frequent and critically important ambassadors, representing our state agencies to stakeholders. Commonly, our work focuses on or supports highly visible projects and programs that generate immense public interest and comment. Many CDFW veterinarians routinely work more than 40 hour/week, on weekends, and after hours as key responders and advisors for urgent animal health and welfare issues. We must maintain the complex knowledge and skills that are required to work and succeed in this fast-moving and high-pressure environment.

The state receives substantial benefit from veterinarians, yet we are not fairly compensated relative to the additional years of effort and personal expense required to gain the knowledge, training, and special certifications that are often a requirement or desired qualification for our duty statements. California's state-employed veterinarians are compensated 20-30% below that of veterinarians working in similar capacities at the academic, county, or federal levels and 30-50% below the average compensation level for veterinarians working in industry and private practice throughout California. The sub-par compensation also decreases our ability to attract the best and brightest veterinarians to tackle the complex issues associated with animal, human, and ecosystem health, welfare, and disease we increasingly face. This threatens to limit the state's ability to be at the forefront of animal health management, animal disease protection and mitigation, and animal welfare.

We implore you to consider the incredible value veterinarians bring to California state agencies, the need to maintain and expand that expertise, and the significant responsibilities state veterinarians are expected to manage every day.

Sincerely,

California Department of Fish and Wildlife Veterinarians

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