

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING
OF THE
ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION**

**Eighty-Second Session
June 3, 2023**

The Committee on Education was called to order by Chair Shannon Bilbray-Axelrod at 1:39 p.m. on Saturday, June 3, 2023, in Room 3138 of the Legislative Building, 401 South Carson Street, Carson City, Nevada. Copies of the minutes, including the Agenda [[Exhibit A](#)], the Attendance Roster [[Exhibit B](#)], and other substantive exhibits, are available and on file in the Research Library of the Legislative Counsel Bureau and on the Nevada Legislature's website at www.leg.state.nv.us/App/NELIS/REL/82nd2023.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

Assemblywoman Shannon Bilbray-Axelrod, Chair
Assemblywoman Angie Taylor, Vice Chair
Assemblywoman Natha C. Anderson
Assemblyman Reuben D'Silva
Assemblywoman Alexis Hansen
Assemblyman Gregory Koenig
Assemblywoman Selena La Rue Hatch
Assemblyman Richard McArthur
Assemblywoman Erica Mosca
Assemblywoman Clara Thomas
Assemblywoman Selena Torres

COMMITTEE MEMBERS ABSENT:

Assemblywoman Melissa Hardy (excused)

GUEST LEGISLATORS PRESENT:

Senator Pete Goicoechea, Senate District No. 19

STAFF MEMBERS PRESENT:

Jen Sturm-Gahner, Committee Policy Analyst
Cameron Newton, Committee Counsel
Judi Bishop, Committee Manager
Funmi Sheddy, Committee Secretary
Ashley Torres, Committee Assistant



OTHERS PRESENT:

Patty Porter, Director, Nevada Office, Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education
Sheila Bray, Community Partnerships Coordinator for Clark County, Extension, College of Agriculture, Biotechnology and Natural Resources, University of Nevada, Reno
Mike Teglas, Associate Professor and Student Advisor, Department of Agriculture, Veterinary and Rangeland Sciences, College of Agriculture, Biotechnology and Natural Resources, University of Nevada, Reno
Stacy L. Hosking, Veterinarian, Nevada Veterinary Cardiology, LLC, Reno, Nevada
Rebecca Goff, Nevada State Director, Humane Society of the United States

Chair Bilbray-Axelrod:

[Roll was taken.] Welcome to what I think might be the final meeting of the Assembly Committee on Education for the 2023 Legislative Session. I am not going to go through the whole spiel. We are just going to get this done. Welcome, Senator Goicoechea. I will open the hearing on Senate Bill 342 (1st Reprint).

Senate Bill 342 (1st Reprint): Enacts provisions relating to veterinary medicine. (BDR 34-1012)

Senator Pete Goicoechea, Senate District No. 19:

Today I am bringing you Senate Bill 342 (1st Reprint). I am going to be as brief as I can on this, and then stand for questions. Today I have with me Sheila Bray from the University of Nevada, Reno (UNR) and Patty Porter from the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE) board, which plays a key part in this bill.

As you know, the state of Nevada does not have a veterinary school. We struggle with veterinary services, especially now with so many companion animals coming out of the pandemic. It is almost impossible to find a vet. I know in southern Nevada it is difficult, and in northern Nevada they are almost nonexistent, especially if you get into the large animals side.

What this bill does: Utah State University (USU) came to us because they did fund a new school of veterinary medicine at USU, which is in Logan, Utah. They were looking for a little financial support as they stood this new school up. They are into it about \$100 million and are needing all they can to stand it up. They came to us and said they would give us 100 slots over the next 10 years for our students. We all know kids who want to be a veterinarian, and even if they come out of their undergraduate school with good grades they cannot find a slot. Even if you qualify for WICHE, you cannot get into the schools because it is so limited. I have had some experience with that. My son went to veterinary school. I know what it costs and how hard it is to get in. The bottom line is, over a ten-year period

this will graduate 70 vets into the state of Nevada. There is a requirement that they come back and do a year's service for every year they take on the program, so I am saying that is around 280 years of veterinary service in the state, which might be helpful going down the road.

This has come through the Senate Committee on Finance. We ended up with \$8 million that will go into a restricted account that will be administered by the Interim Finance Committee (IFC) after the WICHE board negotiates the contract with USU. The last thing I want to be doing is trying to negotiate a contract. They are going to make sure all the i's are dotted and the t's are crossed, and we have a solid contract that will give us the 100 position slots, but will graduate 70 students into the state of Nevada.

I do not know if there is a whole lot more I can tell you. Again, the additional appropriation is to help to stand a couple of positions up for WICHE so they can do the contract and work through it, and this has been approved in the Senate Committee on Finance.

The only other piece of this is clearly they have to apply. Even though we have the slots, those students will have to apply to USU and be accepted—actually meet their acceptance criteria. The WICHE board will interview the students who are applying for these ten slots, and there will be two veterinarians from the state of Nevada to assist the WICHE board in looking at the students and seeing if they are a good fit for the community. The other piece of it, USU is saying as they come back and do their practicum or their internship out of USU, they would like to place them in veterinary clinics in the state of Nevada so they can do their hands-on final year in the state of Nevada, hoping they will connect with the community or a veterinarian so they have a future because they have to come back and go to work. Hopefully they will find a good veterinarian they can work with. We all know we have a number of good, qualified vets who have come out of Nevada, but then we also have veterinarians like Randy Wallstrum, who is getting a little long in the tooth. Most of them are of my vintage.

With that, I will close, and if you have any questions, I have the experts on both sides of me.

Chair Bilbray-Axelrod:

Thank you, Senator Goicoechea. Are there any questions?

Assemblyman Koenig:

This is more a question about the WICHE program than your bill. What other professions are under the WICHE program? I know when I went to school 30 years ago, optometry was. My son who is in optometry school now, when he got ready to start I said, Hey, look into WICHE, sign up for WICHE, and he said, They do not include optometry anymore.

Professions come and go. What other professions, other than veterinary medicine, are in the WICHE system?

Chair Bilbray-Axelrod:

Before you answer the Assemblyman's question, could you tell everyone what WICHE is?

Patty Porter, Director, Nevada Office, Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education:

The acronym WICHE stands for the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education. There is a regional WICHE office, which is in Colorado. My office is called the Nevada Office of WICHE, so I am your representative on behalf of the state of Nevada, which is a member of the Western Regional Education Compact which is governed by *Nevada Revised Statutes* Chapter 397.

To answer your question, currently there are two programs the office oversees. One is called the Professional Student Exchange Program (PSEP) and the other is called the Health Profession Education Program (HPEP). For the PSEP, which is what you had mentioned for optometry, you are right. It was underneath that. Currently that program, which we work in conjunction with regional WICHE, includes physician assistant, physical therapy, occupational therapy, pharmacy, and when we did have veterinary medicine—it was eliminated in 2021—we are asking to reinstate four slots for this next biennium.

The other program, HPEP, includes nurse practitioners, nursing, and social work. If this is approved, this will go under the HPEP, not under PSEP, because this would be a Nevada-specific program.

The WICHE commission will be meeting to evaluate the programs under PSEP to see if they are still in demand, and will make any changes necessary to adjust.

Chair Bilbray-Axelrod:

It did occur to me when this bill came that we did not have you do a presentation. I think you have done presentations in the past, so maybe next session that is something that can happen. I think part of the problem with this is a lot of people do not even know WICHE exists.

Senator Goicoechea:

Again, you need to understand that these 70 slots are truly WICHE. They are going to stand the program up and administer it, but I do believe we presently have four veterinary medicine slots under WICHE. The difference with this is we will stand these up, and these students will be able to go to graduate school at the in-state rate, and that is the savings. It is going to be huge.

Assemblywoman Taylor:

I worked at UNR for quite a while, so I am very familiar with WICHE. I think it is a great tool that a lot of people do not know about. In terms of veterinary medicine, though, I want to make sure our undergraduates from our state who are part of the WICHE exchange will be able to go to USU for their undergraduate and then go on to veterinary school; or is it they have to graduate from a Nevada school and then they will be able to go to USU for graduate school?

Senator Goicoechea:

What I envision, and it does not mean it is exactly accurate, is they would do their undergraduate work here in Nevada, then they would apply to USU. That does not say if you wanted to go to USU to do your undergraduate and then go to graduate school, that you could not do that, but that technically will not access this program. What we are really about is getting students from UNR, the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV), and Nevada State College. Clearly they can get the prerequisites to comply, but again, they would ultimately have to apply to USU and they would have to accept them. All we are doing is qualifying ten students who we think are our best students, who will come through WICHE with those two advisory veterinarians, and then they will stand those up. We want to make sure all USU has to do is accept ten of them. We want to make sure we get our best and our brightest. That will be up to WICHE and the commission. I am hoping they are Nevada students whom we place in graduate school because we do not have one.

Assemblywoman Taylor:

They accept ten students per year. Did I get that right?

Senator Goicoechea:

Yes. The reason the bill shows 70 is because you have the first three years of going to school so it will only graduate 70 of those 100 students, and hopefully we will see how it goes down the road. I understand there have been a couple of programs Nevada has entered into previous to this, one with the University of California, Davis. Dr. Teglas is on the screen there and he can qualify that as well, and then the other I believe was in Ohio. We have done this in the past but never to this extent and, again, it is critical if we want veterinarians in this state, we are going to have to educate them. The big thing to me, and I have been this route, is getting accepted and then being able to afford it when you come out, and this will make it less expensive. It should cut it in half.

Assemblywoman Thomas:

Assemblywoman Taylor asked the question I was going to ask about how the program works. I just want to say this is great. My niece through marriage has decided on veterinarian school and I am sure her parents were wondering what school she would go for to continue this, so this is good.

Is there a program in schools that lets these kids know this program exists? What type of information is out there for them?

Senator Goicoechea:

That is why we are so focused on getting this bill out this session. The school will actually not open until 2025, but if we are here in the 2025 Session looking for money, it is probably not going to happen. That is why we really want to get this out so we can get the contract entered into. We are hoping we can get the agreement hammered out and get it IFC approved in August. As far as the school, probably Dr. Teglas from UNR or Ms. Bray from

the Cooperative Extension through WICHE is going to have to coordinate and make sure. If you are at UNLV or UNR, that university is going to say, Hey, look, we have this program and we can get you for these ten slots.

Sheila Bray, Community Partnerships Coordinator for Clark County, Extension, College of Agriculture, Biotechnology and Natural Resources, University of Nevada, Reno:

I would like to hand it over to my colleague, Dr. Teglás, who is on the phone. He is a professor of veterinary education at UNR. While this will serve the whole state, he has also served as a WICHE representative.

Mike Teglás, Associate Professor and Student Advisor, Department of Agriculture, Veterinary and Rangeland Sciences, College of Agriculture, Biotechnology and Natural Resources, University of Nevada, Reno:

I am a professor at UNR. I am also here to represent WICHE. I am one of the Nevada WICHE veterinary PSEP representatives and have been working closely with Senator Goicoechea on this bill.

As far as admissions go, it will be an admissions process like for any veterinary school. There will be prerequisites. Any Nevada graduate will be available to join this program. It is open to the Nevada residents. They could graduate from any of our fine schools and be a part of it.

There is an evident need for veterinarians in the state both rural as well as in companion animal medicine. All this would do is provide up to 80 spots through the new USU College of Veterinary Medicine school that is projected to open in 2025 with up to 10 spots per year for 70 students. What it will do is pay for the out-of-state differential, and what that means is the funding will provide the out-of-state portion. When they come back, they have an agreement for every year of funding they are provided, they will also provide services as a veterinarian in the state, work in private—

Chair Bilbray-Axelrod:

I am sorry. I am going to cut you off just because I think you came in a little late and we did go over all this.

Patty Porter:

As the director, my intention is to do outreach because if this passes, it is going to be my responsibility for my agency and the WICHE commissioner, so I take that very seriously. I am planning to do outreach in the south and also go to our rural communities to spread the word. I have recruitment and retention experience in my background, so for me this is not a UNR/UNLV thing—it is a Nevada thing.

Chair Bilbray-Axelrod:

I will invite anyone up who is in support of the bill to testify.

Stacy L. Hosking, Veterinarian, Nevada Veterinary Cardiology, LLC, Reno, Nevada:

[Read from [Exhibit C](#).] I am a local, board-certified veterinary cardiologist here in support of this bill. I am a previous recipient of financial assistance from the state of Nevada through the earlier formation of the WICHE program. This program allowed me to attend veterinary school at Ohio State University and achieve my ultimate career goal of becoming a veterinary specialist.

The shortage of veterinary professionals is an important issue that directly impacts the well-being of animals within the state of Nevada and the overall health of our communities. I strongly support the allocation of state funding to educate veterinary students who commit to returning to our state to practice, effectively addressing this pressing issue. This call to action aligns with the objectives outlined in [S.B. 342 \(R1\)](#).

Our state is currently facing a critical shortage of skilled veterinarians. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, employment of veterinarians is projected to grow 19 percent from 2021 to 2031, much faster than the average of all occupations, which is about 5 percent.

If we look at the U.S. Department of Agriculture website and evaluate the Veterinary Services Shortage Situations Map, it is easy to see that there is a critical shortage of private practice-rural area food animal medicine practitioners. This results in limited access to quality veterinary care, particularly in these rural and underserved areas. This shortage not only affects the health and welfare of our pets but also impacts public health as veterinarians play a vital role in disease prevention, zoonotic disease control, and safeguarding the food supply.

[Senate Bill 342 \(1st Reprint\)](#) recognizes the urgency of addressing the shortage and proposes actionable steps to mitigate it. By allocating state funding to educate veterinary students who commit to returning to our state to practice, we create a sustainable pipeline of skilled veterinary professionals. These individuals will bring their expertise, dedication, and compassion back to our communities, ensuring that our Nevada animals will receive the care they deserve and our residents can rely on accessible and comprehensive veterinary services.

Moreover, [S.B. 342 \(R1\)](#) highlights the importance of collaboration and partnerships. It authorizes the Nevada office to enter into contracts and implement programs relating to veterinary medicine, fostering collaboration with institutions such as the Utah State University College of Veterinary Medicine. This collaboration will not only address the veterinary shortage but will also strengthen the ties between our state and other institutions.

State-funded veterinary education programs with return-of-service agreements as proposed in [S.B. 342 \(R1\)](#) have been successfully implemented in various regions to address similar shortages in other states. These programs have proven effective in increasing the number of practicing veterinarians, bolstering the local economy, and improving animal health options.

Chair Bilbray-Axelrod:

I am so sorry. We are on a time crunch. Would you mind giving a copy of your testimony to our committee secretary for the record? Is there anyone else wishing to provide support testimony? [There was no one.] Is there anyone on the phone line?

Rebecca Goff, Nevada State Director, Humane Society of the United States:

On behalf of our Nevada members and the Humane Society Veterinary Medical Association, I am here today in strong support of S.B. 342 (R1). Before I had this role, I spent most of my life working in veterinary medicine and in the last ten years right here in Nevada. I can tell you firsthand that the biggest crisis facing our pets in the state is a lack of access to veterinary care, partially driven by the historic veterinary staffing crisis. This bill would really help address that, specifically bringing our veterinary students back here to the state to practice. With that, we strongly urge your support.

Chair Bilbray-Axelrod:

I will close support and open it to opposition. Is there anyone here in Carson City in opposition? [There was no one.] Is there anyone on the phone lines in opposition? [There was no one.] I will open it up to neutral. Is there anyone here in Carson City in neutral? [There was no one.] Is there anyone on the phone lines in neutral? [There was no one.] Would the bill sponsor like to make closing remarks? [There were none.] I will close the hearing on S.B. 342 (R1) and we will work session this bill.

**Senate Bill 342 (1st Reprint): Enacts provisions relating to veterinary medicine.
(BDR 34-1012)**

Jen Sturm-Gahner, Committee Policy Analyst:

I am the committee policy analyst for the Senate Committee on Education, here today for Alex Drozdoff. The bill before you today for work session is Senate Bill 342 (1st Reprint), which enacts provisions relating to veterinary medicine. There are no proposed amendments at this time.

Chair Bilbray-Axelrod:

Members, do you have any questions on S.B. 342 (R1)? [There were none.] I will accept a motion to do pass Senate Bill 342 (1st Reprint).

ASSEMBLYWOMAN HANSEN MADE A MOTION TO DO PASS
SENATE BILL 342 (1ST REPRINT).

ASSEMBLYWOMAN TORRES SECONDED THE MOTION.

Are there any questions on the motion?

Assemblywoman Torres:

I was not sure where I was on this bill, but seeing such distinguished UNR professors, I am thoroughly convinced and I will be in support today.

Chair Bilbray-Axelrod:

Are there any further questions on the motion? [There were none.]

THE MOTION PASSED. (ASSEMBLYWOMEN ANDERSON AND
HARDY WERE ABSENT FOR THE VOTE.)

I will assign the floor statement to Assemblyman McArthur. That brings us to our last item on the agenda, public comment. Is there anyone in the room wishing to make public comment?

[Public comment was heard.]

Is there anyone on the phone lines wishing to make public comment? [There was no one.]
With that, I will adjourn this meeting [at 2:06 p.m.].

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED:

Funmi Sheddy
Recording Secretary

Gina Hall
Transcribing Secretary

APPROVED BY:

Assemblywoman Shannon Bilbray-Axelrod, Chair

DATE: _____

EXHIBITS

[Exhibit A](#) is the Agenda.

[Exhibit B](#) is the Attendance Roster.

[Exhibit C](#) is written testimony submitted by Stacy L. Hosking, Veterinarian, Nevada Veterinary Cardiology, LLC, Reno, Nevada, in support of Senate Bill 342 (1st Reprint).