

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
STATE OF MONTANA

GREG GIANFORTE
GOVERNOR



KRISTEN JURAS
LT. GOVERNOR

May 15, 2025

The Honorable Brandon Ler
Speaker of the House
State Capitol
Helena, MT 59620

The Honorable Matt Regier
President of the Senate
State Capitol
Helena, MT 59620

Dear Speaker Ler and President Regier:

Over the last four years, we've made major progress in delivering on our shared priority of filling critical workforce shortages in Montana by expanding career and technical education, reforming our outdated licensing system, and building a pipeline of skilled workers through targeted training programs, apprenticeships, and partnerships with the private sector.

House Bill 860 aims to address the workforce shortage of veterinarians in our more rural and frontier areas. House Bill 860 provides up to \$100,000 per year in loan reimbursements to four students who agree to practice veterinary medicine in an underserved area in Montana for four years.

While I appreciate the sponsor's well-intentioned efforts, I have two primary concerns. First, House Bill 860 will cost the General Fund nearly \$375,000 over the biennium, with funding increases in future years. Second, House Bill 860 creates a new advisory committee, attached to the Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education, and requires the committee to issue a new report to the Legislature.

While I am proud of our previous work to address critical workforce shortages, especially in our rural communities, our Montana Constitution requires us to balance our budget. In 2021 and 2023, I am proud that we worked together to deliver balanced budgets that not only were fiscally responsible, but also allowed us to seize the opportunity to let hardworking Montanans keep more of what they earn. The budget proposal I sent to the Legislature for the 2025 Legislative Session was fiscally conservative, keeping spending below inflation.

The budget and other bills with hefty price tags that the Legislature passed, however, are not

fiscally responsible. Therefore, I will keenly review the budget and spending bills the Legislature passed, making some difficult decisions to protect taxpayers and their hard-earned resources. Hardworking Montanans expect us to be fiscally responsible.

Therefore, in accordance with the power vested in me as Governor by the Constitution and the laws of the State of Montana, I hereby veto House Bill 860: "AN ACT PROVIDING FOR A VETERINARY TRAINING LOAN PROGRAM; PROVIDING THAT THE LOAN PROGRAM PROVIDES LOANS TO VETERINARY STUDENTS WHO COMMIT TO PRACTICING IN UNDERSERVED AREAS IN MONTANA; PROVIDING PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS, INCLUDING A PREFERENCE FOR APPLICANTS WHO ARE MONTANA RESIDENTS; PROVIDING FOR REPAYMENT OF THE LOAN IF THE PARTICIPANT DOES NOT FULFILL THE PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS; PROVIDING THAT A FORGIVEN LOAN IS NOT CONSIDERED INCOME FOR INCOME TAX PURPOSES; PROVIDING AN APPROPRIATION; PROVIDING DEFINITIONS; ESTABLISHING REPORTING REQUIREMENTS; AMENDING SECTION 15-30-2120, MCA; AND PROVIDING AN EFFECTIVE DATE AND A TERMINATION DATE."

I look forward to working with the bill sponsor, other members of the Legislature, and industry stakeholders to find sustainable, long-term solutions to addressing Montana's shortage of veterinarians and other critical occupations.

Sincerely,



Greg Gianforte
Governor

Enclosure

cc: Legislative Services Division
Christi Jacobsen, Secretary of State