

SENATE BILL 915

By Burks

AN ACT to amend Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 49, Chapter 4; Title 49, Chapter 9 and Title 63, Chapter 12, relative to an incentive award program for veterinarians.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE:

SECTION 1. There is established as a pilot project an incentive program for graduates of the University of Tennessee college of veterinary medicine, to be administered by the University of Tennessee institute of agriculture under the terms and conditions specified in this act. Such incentive program shall be known as the Tennessee Rural Veterinary Services (TRVS) Program, or hereinafter "the program". The purpose of the program is to provide encouragement, opportunities, and economic incentives for graduates of the University of Tennessee college of veterinary medicine to locate their veterinary practices in underserved rural Tennessee communities and meet the needs of livestock producers and rural Tennessee communities.

SECTION 2. A senior student of the University of Tennessee college of veterinary medicine, subject to such student subsequently receiving the doctor of veterinary medicine degree and obtaining licensure to practice veterinary medicine in Tennessee, shall be eligible to apply to the University of Tennessee institute of agriculture for an incentive award in an amount to be established by the University of Tennessee. The incentive award may be received for a maximum of five (5) years and shall be subject to the incentive award agreement.

SECTION 3. For each year of continuous full-time provision of veterinary services in an under-served rural area of Tennessee, the recipient shall be eligible to receive the annual incentive award established by the University of Tennessee.

SECTION 4. For the purposes of this act, unless the context clearly provides otherwise:

(1) "Agricultural animals" means all animals that provide food, fiber, or fur and all equine; and

(2) "Full-time provision of veterinary services" means the provision of such services, for at least forty (40) hours per week, in a practice in which at least fifty percent (50%) of the veterinary medical services provided are devoted to the care of agricultural animals, subject to audit by the program.

SECTION 5. The University of Tennessee shall promulgate rules and regulations to establish under-served rural areas of the state. In establishing and defining such areas, the University of Tennessee shall first consider the relative need and availability or scarcity of veterinary services for agricultural animals in a community, as determined by the veterinary needs assessment and other pertinent data compiled by the University of Tennessee. The University of Tennessee shall also consider a community's population in proportion to its county's population in establishing under-served rural areas.

SECTION 6. All incentive awards shall be evidenced by notes payable to the University of Tennessee, which shall bear interest at an annual rate of interest to be determined by the University of Tennessee from and after the completion of the incentive award agreement in which the recipient has agreed to practice veterinary medicine full-time in an under-served rural area for at least five (5) years. The notes shall be executed pursuant to rules and regulations promulgated by the University of Tennessee. If the recipient does not fulfill all obligations agreed to by the recipient in the incentive award agreement, the person shall be required to repay the full value of incentive awards received at an annual rate of interest to be determined by the University of Tennessee. Any incentive award made under this act shall be cancelled by the death or the permanent and total disability of the recipient.

SECTION 7. The University of Tennessee shall promulgate rules and regulations for the management of the program and the selection of no more than five (5) recipients per academic

year, taking into consideration such factors as the academic record of the applicant and the period of time in which the applicant shall be required to obtain licensure as a practitioner of veterinary medicine in Tennessee after graduating from the college of veterinary medicine. Preference for participation in the program shall be given to applicants with significant qualified educational debt.

SECTION 8. The University of Tennessee may receive contributions from outside sources for funding the incentive program under conditions prescribed by the University of Tennessee, with the understanding that the funds will be used solely for incentive awards under this act and unused funds shall not revert to the general fund, but shall be carried forward for future student incentive awards.

SECTION 9. Funding from the state of Tennessee shall not revert to the general fund but shall be carried forward to the next fiscal year for future student incentive awards.

SECTION 10. This program shall be available for participants beginning July 1, 2009, after rules have been promulgated. The University of Tennessee is authorized to use public necessity rulemaking in accordance with § 4-5-209(a)(4), as appropriate. The availability of scholarships shall be subject to the appropriation of funds in each year's general appropriations act.

SECTION 11. On or before February 15, 2010, and on or before February 15 of each successive year thereafter, the University of Tennessee shall report to the general assembly its findings concerning the overall performance and success of the Tennessee rural veterinary services (TRVS) program.

SECTION 12. Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 49, Chapter 9, is amended by adding Sections 1 through 11 inclusive of this act as a new, appropriately designated part.

SECTION 13. The provisions of this act shall not be construed to be an appropriation of funds and no funds shall be obligated or expended pursuant to this act unless such funds are specifically appropriated by the general appropriations act.

SECTION 14. The University of Tennessee is authorized to promulgate rules and regulations to effectuate the purposes of this act. All such rules and regulations shall be promulgated in accordance with the provisions of Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 4, Chapter 5.

SECTION 15. This act shall take effect upon becoming a law, the public welfare requiring it.