

April 24, 2024

State of Vermont- House Committee on Judiciary

Hearing: “S. 58 – An act relating to public safety”

Testimony of:

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Thank you, and good morning, Chair LaLonde, Vice Chair Burditt, Ranking Member Christie and members of the Committee. I am Dr. Lindsey Hornickel, Assistant Director in the Government Relations Division of the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA). On behalf of the 105,000 AVMA members, over 400 of whom live in Vermont, I appreciate the opportunity to emphasize the importance of preserving veterinary access to xylazine as Vermont considers legislation to address illicit xylazine.

The AVMA is deeply concerned about the emerging public health threat of illicit xylazine and the negative impact it is having throughout the country. It is critical that as policy is developed to address the illicit supply, that any new enforcement tools do not impede legal and responsible access of xylazine by veterinarians and our clients. The AVMA believes the veterinary provision included in Senate Bill 58 would preserve access to this critical drug for veterinarians.

Xylazine is a prescription animal drug used to facilitate safe handling, as well as safe medical evaluation, treatment, and surgical care of many species. Ready access to this drug keeps

people safe and supports animal welfare when working with cattle, horses, zoo, wildlife, and laboratory species. In cattle, xylazine is the only safe and effective drug for sedation. In zoo and wildlife species, compounded xylazine is administered through darting systems to safely sedate patients remotely. Preserving the ability of veterinarians and their clients to sedate fractious and large animals is critical to keeping people and animals safe.

Preserving veterinary access also relies upon keeping the drug on the market and minimizing supply chain disruptions. There are only two manufacturers of xylazine for the U.S. market. One of these manufacturers does not currently make other controlled drugs and paused production in the second half of last year due to the lack of uniformity and clarity of rulemaking between states. This left only one manufacturer providing product to the entire US market.

Xylazine is a low-volume generic animal drug that generates little revenue for manufacturers. Therefore, adding regulatory burdens or facility investment requirements for the few remaining manufacturers increases the likelihood of supply disruption and could eliminate the drug from the market entirely. The veterinary provision included in Senate Bill 58 would permit the lawful manufacturing, distribution, and use of the FDA-approved and compounded xylazine for veterinarians. In addition, the provision would not impose any additional regulatory burdens or requirements beyond what is already required under state and federal law as a prescription animal drug. Therefore, the language included in Senate Bill 58 would reduce the risk of supply disruptions of legitimate xylazine for Vermont veterinarians.

Since January of 2023, the AVMA has been engaged with policymakers on federal legislation and policy to preserve veterinary access while they work to address illicit xylazine. Over the past year multiple versions of federal legislation have been moving through Congress to address this issue. Although the approaches of these legislative efforts have differed, all versions included bipartisan language intended to maintain legitimate xylazine in the market, as well as preserve access and use of the drug by veterinarians and our clients. In early March 2024, bipartisan, bicameral updated consensus language for the Combating Illicit Xylazine Act was publicly released. The AVMA strongly supports this updated language and is working alongside the bill's sponsors to identify the most efficient and successful route to final passage.

The AVMA encourages the Committee to maintain the veterinary provision included in Senate Bill 58. The included provision is vital to safeguarding veterinary access for xylazine's legitimate uses and minimizes risk for supply chain disruptions by not imposing additional regulation on those handling the drug lawfully. In addition, it would help keep people safe when working with large and dangerous animals, as well as support animal welfare by facilitating access to care.

The AVMA appreciates the attention the Committee is giving to the needs of veterinary medicine while working to address a public health crisis. We will continue to support the work of the Vermont Veterinary Medical Association to ensure Vermont veterinarians and the animals under their care continue to have access to this important animal drug. Thank you and I am happy to answer any questions.