

EMANUEL CLEAVER, II

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FIFTH DISTRICT, MISSOURI

COMMISSION ON SECURITY
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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

December 10, 2025

Mun Y. Choi
University of Missouri-Columbia
Office of the President
105 Jesse Hall
Columbia, MO 65211

Dear Mun Y. Choi,

As a life-long lover of animals, I have the utmost appreciation for those who care for God's creatures. From tending to our furry friends like my own dog Gabriel to maintaining the health of the livestock that help make up the backbone of Missouri's economy, veterinary medicine is an important vocation that affects American lives in powerful ways each day. Just as veterinarians care deeply for society, it is paramount that society also care deeply for veterinarians.

It is with that spirit that I write today concerning troubling allegations of systemic abuse taking place within American veterinary medicine schools. Despite a relatively small number of veterinary schools across the country, recent years have seen an explosion of students speaking out about the conditions at these programs. From anecdotes of patient care suffering due to 100-hour workweeks¹, to losing 15 pounds in a month due to inadequate time to eat², to students not seeing the sun either coming or going to work for

¹ Juliana Feliciano Reyes, "Penn Vet students say they're working 100-hour weeks and patient care is suffering", The Philadelphia Inquirer, Dec. 2023, <https://www.inquirer.com/news/philadelphia/penn-vet-ryan-hospital-workload-20231218.html>

² Jack McClellan, "'We just didn't eat': VetMed students speak out about working conditions", Iowa State Daily, Feb. 2023, <https://iowastatedaily.com/273385/news/we-just-didnt-eat-vetmed-students-speak-out-about-working-conditions/>

two weeks³ - these allegations have become a disturbing pattern, and Congress is starting to take notice. While we recognize that by their very nature these programs will be strenuous and difficult, it is important to underscore that there can be no excuse for these troubling allegations – our educational system is allowed to have high standards for students; however, these allegations go far beyond that which is morally acceptable. If these allegations continue unabated, Congress will be forced to act.

Adding to the complexity, these students continue to speak out despite the fact that there are institutional pressures that make doing so difficult. Veterinary programs are competitive to get into, and many students worry that speaking out might jeopardize their grades or future career. Further, because many are entering the field due to a love for the mission, there can be immense social pressure to put in extra hours to support the team or patients. All of these attributes combine to suggest that those who are speaking publicly might simply be the tip of the iceberg.

While it is heartening to see reforms that have been initiated at various schools, the situation remains opaque. Many of the most troubling abuses to date have occurred despite school procedures and policies already nominally in place that should have prevented such transgressions. When schools claim to have a policy limiting time in clinics to 80 hours per week, yet their students regularly work 100-hour-weeks, it calls into question the effectiveness of any additional policies without true reform that strikes at the heart of the issue. Combined with student hesitation to speak out, an outcome where reforms do nothing but quell student outrage is worrying indeed. In fact, our office has continued to hear from troubled veterinary medicine students about some programs that have already instituted “reforms” in response to this public pressure, highlighting the very concern I share today.

With that, our office is seeking your help to understand this crisis. We request your immediate answers to the following questions -

³ Anna Spidel, “MU vet students speak up about clinical working conditions”, KBIA, Dec. 2024, <https://www.kbia.org/kbia-news/2024-12-11/mu-vet-students-speak-up-about-clinical-working-conditions>

1. What policies or procedures does your institution have in place to ensure veterinary medicine students are not working more than 60 hours per week, as recommended by the Student American Veterinary Medical Association (SAVMA)?
2. With concerns raised that students are often not given time to eat or go to the restroom, what steps does your institution take to ensure that students are given the baseline protections every worker is entitled to in the workplace?
3. What data do you have on the frequency in which student protection policies currently in place are followed in practice?
4. If presented with evidence by students that your policies are not being followed in individual cases, how would you seek to resolve the situation?
5. What protocols are in place to ensure students are protected from retaliation to ensure they feel comfortable voicing issues to the university?
6. What resources does your institution currently provide students to ensure protection of their mental health?
7. How do you suggest that veterinary students can be better protected from exploitative practices such that Congressional action would be unnecessary?

I request your prompt response to these questions to assist in our oversight no later than December 31, 2025.

Warm Regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Emanuel Cleaver, II". The signature is stylized with a large, circular initial "E" and a long, horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Emanuel Cleaver, II
Member of Congress