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Dear Madam Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Dr. Susan Mende. I am a veterinarian, I own a veterinary hospital in Anne Arundel County, and **I OPPOSE HB 1388.**

Twenty years ago, I went to the bank and borrowed \$1.2 million to build an equine hospital to serve this community. I am a business owner in the state of Maryland. Private business owners who are physicians, particularly veterinarians, are not supported by tax dollars or municipalities. We finance our hospitals ourselves in partnership with our communities, full of the customers that we serve. Business owners cannot expand their services, their hours of service, their service areas, or even be willing to expand, mentor, and share data without the protection of restrictive covenants.

I only recently became aware of this legislation, and since learning about it I have tried to give notice to other physicians - doctors, dentists, chiropractors, and veterinarians - that also own businesses in Maryland. Everyone I approached was unaware of this legislation. Before it is passed, I will comment that this bill has not been transparent to the constituents that it impacts the most. It has no definitions for 'conflict of interest' or 'non-compete'. It is not protecting the business owners that pay state taxes, property taxes, income and payroll taxes, and who have put millions of dollars on the line to help their communities by creating jobs and local commerce. Are other professional boards aware of this legislation? How does Anne Arundel Medical Center or John Hopkins Medical Center feel about having all their doctors' contracts nullified retroactively? Is it even legal to nullify these agreements retroactively? These contracts that exist cannot be sweepingly nullified without allowing involved parties the opportunity to update agreements to comply with state laws and still provide their businesses with appropriate protections.

I have attended numerous trade conferences where the question is posed "where is the next generation of business owners?" Apparently, according to their research, the next generation is hesitant to take up the responsibility of practice and business ownership. Does this legislation represent that slender sliver of entrepreneurs? How much more reluctant will they be if their newly fledged businesses will lose this layer of protection?

Thank you

Dr. Susan A Mende, DVM, Diplomat ABVP