

**Summary of the Written Testimony from Dr. Fred Gingrich for the “Policies to  
Protect our Communities from Illicit Drug Threats”**

Hearing Date: March 26, 2026

- As the largest veterinary organization in the United States, the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) strongly supports swift passage of the bipartisan, bicameral Combating Illicit Xylazine Act.
- This legislation represents a thoughtful, balanced, and urgently needed solution that both addresses the serious human health threat posed by illicit xylazine and preserves access to this essential drug for legitimate veterinary use as a controlled substance.
- Xylazine is a non-narcotic, Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved, prescription veterinary sedative used to facilitate the safe handling, restraint, and treatment of many species and is particularly important for use in cattle, horses, zoo, and wildlife species, as well as in biomedical research.
- The DEA does not have the authority under the Controlled Substances Act to make the necessary modifications to keep the veterinary product available on the U.S. market and keep the common legitimate uses of xylazine legal as a controlled drug.
- Passage of the Combating Illicit Xylazine Act is needed now to avoid the unintended consequences of administrative scheduling by the DEA, as well as provide federal regulatory uniformity to alleviate the patchwork of inconsistent state-by-state xylazine restrictions.
- Any supply disruption or limit to veterinary use of xylazine will have serious immediate and long-term consequences for human safety and animal welfare.

United States House Committee on Energy & Commerce  
Health Subcommittee

Hearing:

“Policies to Protect Our Communities from Illicit Drug Threats”

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Testimony of

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## **Introduction**

Thank you, and good afternoon, Chairman Griffith, Ranking Member DeGette, and Members of the Subcommittee. I am Dr. Fred Gingrich, Executive Director of the American Association of Bovine Practitioners (AABP) and appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of the American Veterinary Medical Association's (AVMA) more than 111,000 veterinary members across the United States. We appreciate the Subcommittee's leadership in addressing the growing dangers posed by emerging substances while preserving access to those with legitimate medical uses, including xylazine.

I am a 1995 graduate of The Ohio State University College of Veterinary Medicine and spent more than two decades in private practice focusing on cattle health, productivity, and welfare in California and Ohio. In 2016, I became Executive Director of AABP, the largest cattle veterinary association in the United States, representing over 4,000 members, and I continue to practice veterinary medicine. As an over 30-year member of the AVMA, I have served in numerous leadership roles and worked with colleagues from across the breadth of our profession. My professional experience reflects a deep commitment to animal health, public safety, and the veterinary profession.

As the largest veterinary organization in the United States who members care passionately about protecting animal health, animal welfare, and human health, the AVMA strongly supports swift passage of the bipartisan, bicameral Combating Illicit Xylazine Act. We believe this legislation represents a thoughtful, balanced, and urgently needed solution that both addresses the serious human health threat posed by illicit

xylazine and preserves access to this essential drug for legitimate veterinary use as a controlled substance.

### **Growing Threat of Illicit Xylazine**

The veterinary community is deeply concerned about the public health crisis caused by the rapid proliferation of illicit xylazine. Increasingly, illicit xylazine is being found in combination with illicit fentanyl and other opioids, creating a dangerous and often deadly mixture. Because xylazine is an alpha-2 adrenergic agonist and not an opioid, its effects cannot be reversed with naloxone, an opioid antidote, which complicates efforts of first responders and emergency physicians when treating overdoses.

The AVMA understands there is no significant diversion of legitimate xylazine from U.S. veterinary supply channels. In discussions with the Administration, federal agencies, and state law enforcement officials, illicit manufacturing and importation of the drug from overseas are commonly raised as the predominant sources of illicit xylazine.

Veterinarians share the Subcommittee's concern about these developments. While xylazine is not approved for human use, its growing presence in the illicit drug market has contributed to devastating human health outcomes.

### **The Essential Role of Xylazine in Veterinary Medicine**

At the same time, it is critical to recognize that xylazine is an indispensable tool in veterinary medicine. As a non-narcotic, Food and Drug Administration (FDA)-approved, veterinary sedative, xylazine has been used for over 50 years to facilitate the safe handling, restraint, and treatment of a broad range of animal species. It is particularly important for use in livestock, zoo, wildlife species, as well as in research settings.

In our veterinary patients, xylazine can be used alone for sedation to restrain or immobilize animals for the safety of the animal and people working on a fractious or painful patient. Small quantities of xylazine are also dispensed under a valid veterinarian-client-patient relationship (VCPR), as defined by FDA at 21 CFR 530.3(i), to livestock producers for sedation and analgesia during husbandry procedures like dehorning calves, as well as to facilitate safe handling in urgent and emergent circumstances. Veterinarians also work under a VCPR with responsible, specially trained personnel at meat processing facilities, who follow protocols for procedures and doses of the sedative to safely immobilize non-ambulatory animals, as required by U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). These non-ambulatory animals do not enter the food supply. Xylazine can also be used in-combination with local anesthetics or other drugs for anesthesia by veterinarians during surgical procedures, such as a laparotomy or cesarian-section in cattle and other standing procedures in horses.

In shelter medicine and animal control programs, xylazine is often part of protocols to sedate animals safely, effectively, and affordably. This not only prevents pain, stress, and suffering for animals during handling, surgical procedures and evaluations, but also protects the medical staff and officers involved with these procedures from injury.

Xylazine is a vital tool for zoo and wildlife practitioners involved in research, medical and surgical care of sick and injured animals, and disease investigations. These veterinarians use the FDA-approved product, as well as higher concentration compounded formulations to minimize the drug volume when relying on immobilization darts for delivery of the drug.

Additionally, in veterinary species, xylazine can be reversed. Reversing the drug can keep animals from hurting themselves while recovering from sedation, prevent secondary injuries from prolonged sedation and allows animals to quickly and safely re-enter the herd or the wild.

For a number of species there are alternative drugs that can be used for sedation, but not all. In cattle, there is no safe, practical alternative for sedation. Without xylazine, veterinarians and producers face significantly increased risks of injury, and animals may be subjected to unnecessary stress or harm during medical procedures. The availability of xylazine is therefore directly tied to both human safety and animal welfare.

Xylazine has critical uses in veterinary medicine, but overall, this is a 50-year-old, small market generic animal drug with low profitability. If increased regulatory burden and facility investments are required for compliance to manufacture xylazine as a controlled substance, we are very concerned it could push the two remaining manufacturers to discontinue production.

Any policy response to illicit xylazine must carefully preserve access for these legitimate uses. Failure to do so would have serious and immediate consequences for veterinary practice, food animal production, and animal care nationwide.

### **A Balanced Legislative Solution**

The Combating Illicit Xylazine Act achieves this critical balance. This bill is the result of over three years of productive conversations between congressional offices, committee staff, stakeholder groups, and includes extensive technical assistance from the Department of Justice (DOJ), Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), and Health and

Human Services (HHS). The consensus language schedules xylazine under the Controlled Substances Act and contains several statutory changes designed to preserve the critical legitimate veterinary uses of the drug and keep it viable as a drug in the U.S. market, as well as providing the DEA transparency into the market.

By placing xylazine on a schedule in the Controlled Substances Act, the bill provides law enforcement with tools to address illicit xylazine trafficking. At the same time, it includes key statutory provisions designed specifically to ensure veterinarians can continue to access and use xylazine appropriately as a controlled substance.

### **The Risks of Inaction**

Absent congressional action, our understanding is that the DEA will administratively schedule xylazine. The DEA does not have the authority to administratively change the Controlled Substances Act to make the necessary modifications to protect veterinary access and the current legitimate uses of xylazine as a controlled drug. Such an outcome would unintentionally restrict how veterinarians use the drug, create burdensome regulatory barriers, and jeopardize the continued availability of the drug in the legitimate marketplace.

Passage of the Combating Illicit Xylazine Act is needed now to avoid the unintended consequences of administrative scheduling by the DEA. Without Congress enacting these statutory changes to the Controlled Substances Act, the DEA lacks the authority to ensure veterinarians maintain use of and access to the legitimate drug. Important provisions include the ‘ultimate user’ definition amendment, which would allow appropriate dispensing to and possession of xylazine for our clients as a controlled drug.

In addition, the bill would help ensure the only two remaining xylazine manufacturers stay in the market by reducing related capital expenditures, thus reducing the risk of supply chain disruption or losing the drug from the marketplace entirely. A disruption in the availability of xylazine would have profound consequences. Veterinarians could lose access to this critical medication with no viable substitute, increasing risks to practitioners, animal handlers, and the public. Animal welfare would be compromised, and the ability to provide timely and humane care would be diminished.

Additionally, in the absence of a federal framework, states have begun to adopt their own restrictions on xylazine, resulting in a patchwork of inconsistent policies across the country. To date, 29 states have considered xylazine restrictions, and of those, 16 have enacted varying restrictions. This fragmented approach creates confusion, complicates compliance, and further threatens the stability of the veterinary supply chain. It also complicates compliance for veterinarians practicing across state lines as they are increasingly having to comply with differing rules and regulations. The AVMA also opposes any temporary scheduling of xylazine, as it perpetuates the regulatory uncertainty for manufacturers, making it more likely they will simply walk away from what is a low-volume, low-margin product for them.

Only Congress can establish a uniform national policy that (1) addresses the illicit supply, (2) ensures continued access for legitimate veterinary purposes, and (3) updates the antiquated definition of “ultimate user” to reflect current legitimate practices. This makes legislative action not only preferable, but essential.

## **Broad Support for Legislative Action**

The urgency and importance of this issue are underscored by the support of key federal agencies. Both the FDA and the DEA support the legislative approach embodied in the Combating Illicit Xylazine Act. Notably, the DEA explicitly called on Congress to pass this legislation in its Fiscal Year 2025 budget justification.

The previous Administration and the current Administration also support this policy approach, as each have directed agencies to work with Congress on legislative efforts to control xylazine in Schedule III. The legislation has also been endorsed by all 50-state veterinary medical associations and numerous national stakeholder groups.

## **Conclusion**

The AVMA commends the Subcommittee for its attention to this critical issue and for its ongoing efforts to combat illicit drug threats facing our communities. We also appreciate the Committee's prior work advancing xylazine-related legislation with strong bipartisan support.

We respectfully urge Congress to act swiftly to pass the Combating Illicit Xylazine Act. Doing so will protect public health, support law enforcement efforts, preserve veterinary access, and ensure the continued humane care of animals across the United States.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony. We look forward to continuing to work with the Subcommittee and Congress on this important matter.