

118TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

S. _____

To provide public health veterinary services to Indian Tribes and Tribal organizations for rabies prevention, and for other purposes.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

Ms. MURKOWSKI introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on _____

A BILL

To provide public health veterinary services to Indian Tribes and Tribal organizations for rabies prevention, and for other purposes.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Veterinary Services
5 to Improve Public Health in Rural Communities Act”.

6 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS; SENSE OF CONGRESS.**

7 (a) FINDINGS.—Congress finds that—

8 (1) human, animal, and environmental health
9 are interdependent in Native communities, Alaska
10 Native villages, and on Indian reservations, and ho-

1 listic approaches to the well-being of all individuals
2 will lead to improved health outcomes and enhanced
3 resilience;

4 (2) uncontrolled animal populations and a lack
5 of veterinary care in Native communities, Alaska
6 Native villages, and on Indian reservations increase
7 the risk of parasites and zoonotic diseases, dog bites,
8 food insecurity, and mental health issues among
9 Alaska Natives and American Indians;

10 (3) dog bites and other injuries are common in
11 rural areas in the State of Alaska, with the Norton
12 Sound Health Corporation reporting an average of
13 87 bites per year in the Bering Strait region be-
14 tween 2016 and 2023, and the Yukon-Kuskokwim
15 Health Corporation reporting an average of 98 bites
16 per year in the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta region be-
17 tween 2008 and 2017;

18 (4) Alaska Native children have the highest in-
19 cidence of hospitalization for dog bites in the Indian
20 Health Service system;

21 (5) in 2021, St. Lawrence Island, Alaska, expe-
22 rienced co-occurring outbreaks of rabies and canine
23 distemper;

24 (6) canine distemper is almost 100 percent
25 fatal in marine mammals, which the people of the

1 Native Villages of Savoonga and Gambell rely on
2 heavily as a food source;

3 (7) rabies is enzootic in arctic and red fox pop-
4 ulations in the northern and western coastal regions
5 of the State of Alaska;

6 (8) wildlife outbreaks occur cyclically, and there
7 have been increased human exposures to rabid ani-
8 mals between 2020 and 2023;

9 (9) rabies transmission is a significant threat in
10 Alaska Native communities and villages; and

11 (10) as of 2024, the Indian Health Service does
12 not employ or use public health veterinarians to
13 combat zoonotic disease outbreaks or to generally
14 advance public health preparedness for Native com-
15 munities, Alaska Native villages, or Indian reserva-
16 tions, including by providing spay and neuter serv-
17 ices and vaccinations for animals.

18 (b) SENSE OF CONGRESS.—It is the sense of Con-
19 gress that the Indian Health Service of the Department
20 of Health and Human Services is uniquely suited to em-
21 power Indian Tribes and Tribal organizations to address
22 zoonotic disease threats in the communities they serve by
23 providing public health veterinary services through a One
24 Health approach that recognizes the interconnection be-

1 tween people, animals, plants, and their shared environ-
2 ment.

3 **SEC. 3. PUBLIC HEALTH VETERINARY SERVICES.**

4 Title II of the Indian Health Care Improvement Act
5 is amended by inserting after section 223 (25 U.S.C.
6 1621v) the following:

7 **“SEC. 224. PUBLIC HEALTH VETERINARY SERVICES.**

8 “(a) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

9 “(1) PUBLIC HEALTH VETERINARY SERV-
10 ICES.—The term ‘public health veterinary services’
11 includes any of the following:

12 “(A) spaying and neutering services for do-
13 mestic animals;

14 “(B) diagnoses;

15 “(C) surveillance;

16 “(D) epidemiology;

17 “(E) control;

18 “(F) prevention;

19 “(G) elimination;

20 “(H) vaccination; and

21 “(I) any other related service or activity
22 that reduces the risk of zoonotic disease trans-
23 mission or antimicrobial resistance in humans,
24 food, or animals.

1 “(2) ZOOBOTIC DISEASE.—The term ‘zoonotic
2 disease’ means a disease or infection that may be
3 transmitted naturally from vertebrate animals to hu-
4 mans, or from humans to vertebrate animals.

5 “(b) AUTHORIZATION FOR VETERINARY SERVICES.—
6 The Secretary, acting through the Service, may expend
7 funds, directly or pursuant to the Indian Self-Determina-
8 tion and Education Assistance Act (25 U.S.C. 5301 et
9 seq.), for public health veterinary services to prevent and
10 control of zoonotic disease infection and transmission in
11 Service areas where the risk for disease occurrence in hu-
12 mans and wildlife is endemic.

13 “(c) PUBLIC HEALTH OFFICERS.—In providing pub-
14 lic health veterinary services under subsection (b), the Sec-
15 retary shall deploy veterinary public health officers from
16 the Commissioned Corps of the Public Health Service to
17 Service areas.

18 “(d) COORDINATION.—The Secretary, acting through
19 the Service, shall carry out this section in coordination
20 with—

21 “(1) the Director of the Centers for Disease
22 Control and Prevention; and

23 “(2) the Secretary of Agriculture.

24 “(e) REPORT.—The Secretary shall submit to the
25 Committee on Indian Affairs of the Senate, the Committee

1 on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions of the Senate,
2 the Committee on Natural Resources of the House of Rep-
3 resentatives, and the Committee on Energy and Commerce
4 of the House of Representatives a biennial report on the
5 use of funds, the assignment and deployment of veterinary
6 public health officers from the Commissioned Corps of the
7 Public Health Service, data related to the monitoring and
8 disease surveillance of zoonotic diseases, and related serv-
9 ices provided under this section.”.

10 **SEC. 4. APHIS WILDLIFE SERVICES STUDY ON ORAL RABIES**

11 **VACCINES IN ARCTIC REGIONS OF THE**
12 **UNITED STATES.**

13 Not later than 1 year after the date of enactment
14 of this Act, the Secretary of Agriculture shall conduct a
15 feasibility study—

16 (1) on the delivery of oral rabies vaccines to
17 wildlife reservoir species that are directly or indi-
18 rectly connected to the transmission of rabies to
19 Tribal members living in Arctic regions of the
20 United States; and

21 (2) that—

22 (A) evaluates the efficacy of the vaccines
23 described in paragraph (1); and

24 (B) makes recommendations to improve
25 the delivery of those vaccines.

1 **SEC. 5. ONE HEALTH FRAMEWORK.**

2 Section 2235(b) of the Prepare for and Respond to
3 Existing Viruses, Emerging New Threats, and Pandemics
4 Act (42 U.S.C. 300hh–37(b)) is amended by striking “and
5 the Secretary of the Interior” and inserting “, the Sec-
6 retary of the Interior, and the Director of the Indian
7 Health Service”.