

PRESS RELEASE

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Michael San Filippo
Phone: 847-285-6687
Cell: 847-732-6194
e-mail: msanfilippo@avma.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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California Congresswoman Urges Passage of Bill to Increase Veterinary Infrastructure, Protect Public Health

Schaumburg, Ill.— Citing concern over emerging animal-borne diseases such as avian influenza and the "dangerously low" number of veterinarians available to detect and respond to such diseases, [U.S. Rep. Mary Bono](#) (R-Calif.) has sponsored a bill that would expand the workforce of veterinarians engaged in public health practice.



U.S. Rep. Mary Bono

Known as the [Veterinary Workforce Expansion Act](#), the bill would provide \$1.5 billion over the next 10 years to expand the size of veterinary schools and increase the number of veterinarians trained in public health and biomedical research.

"Veterinary medicine is essential to public health and the advancement of biomedical research, which in-turn is essential to strengthening our nation's emergency preparedness efforts," Bono said. "Threats to America's food supply and potential outbreaks of diseases from West Nile virus to mad cow disease to bird flu to SARS remain a serious and contentious issue.

"With veterinary medical colleges at capacity and only 27 states providing direct support to the colleges, federal support is key to addressing the current and forecasted need for an increase in veterinary education. I am proud to stand with my colleagues who supported and continue to support the veterinary workforce."

The American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) is pushing for the passage of the bill, stressing that the neglect of veterinary medical education threatens the lives of U.S. citizens.

"Highly contagious avian influenza, foot and mouth disease and mad cow disease are all naturally occurring threats that have the potential to severely impact animal health and welfare, food safety and public health, and devastate the U.S. economy," AVMA President Roger Mahr, DVM, said. "As first responders, veterinarians are critical to preventing, diagnosing and controlling biological agents that can be transmitted between animals and human beings.

The bill (H.R. 2206) was introduced in May 2005 by Rep. Charles "Chip" Pickering (R-Miss.) and has received bipartisan support from 83 cosponsors, including Bono. A companion bill was introduced in the Senate by Sen. Wayne Allard (R-Colo.), a veterinarian.

"Veterinarians are in a position to detect and respond early to emerging infectious diseases and potential bioterror threats," Allard said in a statement. "By increasing the number of graduates and improving our research capabilities in veterinary medicine, we can make sure that our country is ready to face the public health challenges of the future."

Dr. Mahr of the AVMA cited the work of Tracey McNamara, DVM, a former veterinarian at the Bronx Zoo,

who in 1999 connected the deaths of crows at the zoo with the deaths of several people in New York, leading to the discovery of West Nile virus in the United States and potentially saving hundreds of lives.

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The AVMA, founded in 1863, is one of the oldest and largest veterinary medical organizations in the world. More than 74,000 member veterinarians are engaged in a wide variety of professional activities. AVMA members are dedicated to advancing the science and art of veterinary medicine including its relationship to public health and agriculture. Visit the AVMA Web site at www.avma.org to learn more about veterinary medicine and animal care and to access up-to-date information on the association's issues, policies and activities.