

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 21, 2021

The Honorable Rochelle Walensky
Director
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
1600 Clifton Road
Atlanta, GA 30329

Dear Director Walensky:

I write today regarding the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC's) recent decision to suspend the import of dogs from high-risk countries for canine rabies and inquire about the agency's future plans related to this suspension.

I greatly respect the CDC's acute attention toward keeping both animals and people safe in its decision to limit the importation of dogs as the deadly COVID-19 virus continues to spread throughout the United States. I also appreciate the temporary nature of the suspension, and I hope to work with the CDC to limit the threat of rabies spreading in the U.S. while still protecting the rights of responsible pet owners.

I have, however, heard from many of my constituents with questions and concerns about the CDC's decision to suspend dogs from 113 countries with heightened risk for rabies, which went into effect on July 14, 2021. I understand this decision was prompted by several factors relevant to the pandemic, including a recent lack of facilities for quarantining dogs safely and a disruption to vaccination programs for animals and people. I applaud the agency for acting quickly to ensure that the canine rabies virus variant—which has been eradicated in the U.S. since 2007—is not reintroduced.

While I believe the decision was necessary, as reported cases of COVID-19 continue to decline with vaccination efforts underway, I also encourage the agency to develop plans to eventually lift the importation ban while still ensuring the health and safety of dogs in the aftermath of the public health emergency. The temporary ban has been a cause for concern for the many U.S. diplomatic and military families who live in Virginia. While I know these families can be considered for a waiver, your agency's website says these approvals are advanced "on an extremely limited basis," and this onerous application process has left pet owners scrambling to find a solution.

I respectfully ask that the CDC work with Congress to find long-term solutions to this problem, specifically focusing on the following areas: the pandemic's disruption on vaccination programs for animals and people, the lack of safe animal quarantine facilities in the U.S., the surge in breeders cutting corners due to the increasing demand for pets brought on by the pandemic, and the unique impact the ban has had on diplomatic and military families. I would also encourage that, in finding long-term solutions to this problem, the CDC proactively engages in conversations with stakeholders that will be impacted by this ban, including rescue groups,

representatives of U.S. diplomatic and military families, and other interested parties. In this vein we would recommend that the agency holds listening sessions with stakeholders impacted by the ban to better understand the needs of these communities and to ensure that any long-term solutions best serve the needs of both the CDC and the impacted communities.

For years, the U.S. had strict quarantine and rabies vaccination procedures in place that proved highly effective in keeping animals in the U.S. safe from rabies. As we continue to adapt our ways of life in the aftermath of the pandemic, I look forward to your partnership in tackling these issues.

I appreciate your time and attention to this matter. I look forward to working together to ensure the health and safety of Americans and their pets.

Sincerely,



Mark R. Warner
United States Senator