

# Bill to create commission on Native youth inches closer to passage

A bill that supporters say will improve the lives of Native youth is one step closer to final passage in the 114th Congress.

S.246, the Alyce Spotted Bear and Walter Soboleff Commission on Native Children Act, creates a panel to study ways to improve health, education and other outcomes for American Indian and Alaska Native youth. The bipartisan bill was approved by the House Committee on Natural Resources by unanimous consent last week, clearing it for consideration in the House.

"From living in dilapidated homes with scant educational and economic opportunities, Native young people experience some of the highest rates of suicide and post-traumatic stress in

the country, yet they are often forced to overcome these barriers on their own," said Sen. Heidi Heitkamp (D-North Dakota), who introduced the bill.

"It's my hope that as the full House considers this bill, it does so with the urgency of these problems in mind. Together, we can promote the better outcomes Native young people deserve."

"This bill will create a commission to make recommendations on how to ensure that Native children are better taken care of and given the opportunities needed to thrive," said Sen. Lisa

Murkowski (R-Alaska), a co-sponsor.

The Senate passed the measure in June 2015 by unanimous consent. It only needs to be passed by the House before it can be sent to President Barack Obama for his possible signature.

The measure is named in honor of Alyce Spotted Bear, a former chairwoman of the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara Nation in North Dakota who served on the National Advisory Council on Indian Education prior to her passing in 2013. She was a well-regarded educator.



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