

116TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

S. 4732

To conduct a study on the spread of COVID–19-related disinformation and misinformation on the internet and social media platforms, and for other purposes.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

SEPTEMBER 24, 2020

Ms. HIRONO (for herself, Mr. BOOKER, Mr. BLUMENTHAL, Ms. KLOBUCHAR, Ms. WARREN, and Mr. REED) introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions

A BILL

To conduct a study on the spread of COVID–19-related disinformation and misinformation on the internet and social media platforms, 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 “COVID–19 Disinfor-
5 mation Research and Reporting Act of 2020”.

6 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS.**

7 Congress finds the following:

1 (1) The National Academies of Sciences, Engi-
2 neering, and Medicine and the National Science
3 Foundation have provided scientific, evidence-based
4 findings and foundational research, across all dis-
5 ciplines, that benefit the people of the United States.

6 (2) Accurate and reliable information is impera-
7 tive for health and safety during a national emer-
8 gency like the COVID–19 pandemic.

9 (3) Disinformation and misinformation have
10 spread alarmingly during the COVID–19 pandemic,
11 hindering the public response efforts of Federal,
12 State, local, and indigenous leaders.

13 (4) The internet and social media have made it
14 easier to spread fake medical information, such as
15 unproven treatments for COVID–19, or inaccurate
16 information that undermines scientific experts.

17 (5) COVID–19-related disinformation has been
18 weaponized by foreign adversaries, including Russia,
19 China, and Iran, through the use of fake social
20 media accounts and bot networks to amplify content.

21 (6) Understanding the financial incentives for
22 entities spreading and amplifying disinformation and
23 misinformation can help to combat its distribution.

1 **SEC. 3. SCIENCE STUDY ON COVID-19-RELATED DISINFOR-**
2 **MATION AND MISINFORMATION.**

3 (a) STUDY.—Not later than 30 days after the date
4 of enactment of this Act, the Director of the National
5 Science Foundation shall enter into an arrangement with
6 the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and
7 Medicine to conduct a study on the current understanding
8 of the spread of COVID-19-related disinformation and
9 misinformation on the internet and social media plat-
10 forms. The study shall address—

11 (1) the roles disinformation and misinformation
12 have played in the public response to COVID-19;

13 (2) the sources, both foreign and domestic, of
14 COVID-19-related disinformation and misinforma-
15 tion, and the mechanisms by which that disinforma-
16 tion and misinformation influence the public debate;

17 (3) the role social media plays in the dissemina-
18 tion and promotion of COVID-19-related disinfor-
19 mation and misinformation content and the role so-
20 cial media platforms play in the organization of
21 groups seeking to spread COVID-19-related disin-
22 formation and misinformation;

23 (4) the potential financial returns for creators
24 or distributors of COVID-19-related disinformation
25 and misinformation and the role such financial in-

1 centives play in the propagation of COVID–19-re-
2 lated disinformation and misinformation;

3 (5) potential strategies to mitigate the dissemi-
4 nation and negative impacts of COVID–19-related
5 disinformation and misinformation (and specifically
6 the dissemination of disinformation and misinforma-
7 tion on social media), including through improved
8 disclosures and addressing information literacy; and

9 (6) an analysis of—

10 (A) the limitations of the mitigation strate-
11 gies described in paragraph (5); and

12 (B) how the strategies can be implemented
13 without infringing on the constitutional rights
14 and civil liberties of the people of the United
15 States.

16 (b) REPORT.—In entering into an arrangement under
17 this section, the Director of the National Science Founda-
18 tion shall request that the National Academies of Sciences,
19 Engineering, and Medicine transmit to Congress a report
20 on the results of the study not later than 1 year after
21 the date of enactment of this Act.

22 (c) AUTHORIZATION.—There is authorized to be ap-
23 propriated, for the purposes of conducting the study under
24 this section, \$1,000,000.

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