

117TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. R. 2336

To authorize the establishment of HOPE Account Pilot Projects, HOPE Action Plans Pilot Projects, and competitive grants for pilot projects.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

APRIL 1, 2021

Mr. MORELLE (for himself, Mr. MCGOVERN, and Mr. ESPAILLAT) introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Financial Services, and in addition to the Committees on Energy and Commerce, Agriculture, Education and Labor, Ways and Means, and the Judiciary, for a period to be subsequently determined by the Speaker, in each case for consideration of such provisions as fall within the jurisdiction of the committee concerned

A BILL

To authorize the establishment of HOPE Account Pilot Projects, HOPE Action Plans Pilot Projects, and competitive grants for pilot projects.

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 “Health, Opportunity,
5 and Personal Empowerment Act of 2021” or “HOPE Act
6 of 2021”.

1 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS.**

2 The Congress finds the following:

3 (1) In 2018, according to the Department of
4 Agriculture, 37,200,000 individuals in the United
5 States (including 11,100,000 children) lived in food
6 insecure households. That equals 1 in 9 individuals
7 and 1 in 7 children.

8 (2) In 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic,
9 food insecurity in the United States soared, with the
10 Census Household Pulse Survey finding that at least
11 22 percent of Americans, and 28 percent of children
12 in the United States, suffered from food insecurity
13 in the height of the pandemic.

14 (3) In 2018, according to the Bureau of the
15 Census, 34,000,000 individuals (including
16 10,500,000 children) lived below the Federal poverty
17 line. The majority of these individuals living in pov-
18 erty were working people, children, older individuals,
19 and individuals with disabilities.

20 (4) Many low-income individuals work multiple
21 jobs and, contrary to common misconceptions, if un-
22 employed, they spend a great deal of time looking
23 for work. They often travel by public transportation,
24 laboriously making multiple connections to shuttle
25 between home, work, social service agencies, houses
26 of worship, and grocery stores. For those living in

1 rural and suburban areas far from work and without
2 adequate public transportation they rely upon vehi-
3 cles to get to work, but these are often less reliable
4 secondhand vehicles, that often break down. From
5 traveling greater distances between available jobs
6 and livable areas with affordable housing options,
7 seeking out scarce childcare options that fit a tight
8 budget and a constrained travel schedule, and caring
9 for elderly parents or grandparents because a senior
10 living facility is not financially realistic, low-income
11 individuals have little spare time.

12 (5) While government safety net programs help
13 tens of million of individuals avoid starvation, home-
14 lessness, and other outcomes even more dreadful
15 than everyday poverty, there are significant obstacles
16 that those seeking and maintaining government as-
17 sistance face for as long as they are eligible. Quali-
18 fied applicants are often required to travel signifi-
19 cant distances to multiple government offices, pre-
20 paring and submitting piles of nearly identical pa-
21 perwork to access the different government assist-
22 ance programs. Even when the application process
23 begins online, the eligible applicant is typically still
24 required to physically follow up with each govern-
25 ment office with physical copies, for near identical

1 meetings. As a result, many low-income people are
2 actually unaware of all the government benefits for
3 which they are eligible, reducing the amount of help
4 going to individuals in need by tens of billions of
5 dollars every year. The lines in these offices can
6 seem endless, and sometimes clients need to wait
7 outside, for hours, in the worst kinds of weather.
8 Many offices don't have weekend or night hours, so
9 an applicant is at risk of losing wages when often
10 their only option is to apply for government help
11 during work hours.

12 (6) Each year, many vital government programs
13 go underutilized because eligible beneficiaries are
14 hindered by obtrusive, time consuming, and repet-
15 itive application barriers. In 2017, according to the
16 Department of Agriculture, 16 percent of all people
17 eligible for supplemental nutrition assistance pro-
18 gram (SNAP), 53 percent of the "working poor" eli-
19 gible for SNAP, and 52 percent of adults over 60
20 who were eligible failed to receive it.

21 (7) The United States has hundreds of thou-
22 sands of nonprofit groups providing high quality and
23 much needed social services, but it is nearly impos-
24 sible for struggling people to determine which of
25 those organizations provides services they need,

1 whether the organization is conveniently located, and
2 for which services they are eligible. If they do deter-
3 mine that a nonprofit (or multiple nonprofits) could
4 help, they need to take yet more time to visit each
5 one.

6 (8) Since many government and nonprofit pro-
7 grams require frequent reapplications and recertifi-
8 cations, a low-income person often has to repeat the
9 same endless and frustrating process.

10 (9) Technology has fundamentally revamped the
11 lives of most individuals, usually for the better. Ac-
12 cording to the Pew Research Center, 71 percent of
13 low-income individuals have a smart phone as of
14 2019 (not because a smart phone is a luxury but be-
15 cause it is an essential tool of learning and work in
16 modern America) but they rarely can use these de-
17 vices to apply for benefits. Digital technology, com-
18 bined with policy improvements, can simplify the
19 lives and boost the long-term self-sufficiency of our
20 lowest income residents.

21 **SEC. 3. DEFINITIONS.**

22 (1) SECRETARIES.—The term “Secretaries”
23 means the Secretary of Health and Human Services,
24 the Secretary of Agriculture, and the Secretary of

1 Housing and Urban Development, acting collabo-
2 ratively.

3 (2) ELIGIBLE ENTITY.—The term “eligible pilot
4 community” means a State, unit of general purpose
5 local government, Tribal government, or an entity
6 that represents a smaller geographical area therein
7 (including a neighborhood).

8 (3) TARGET POPULATION.—The term “target
9 population” includes an individual or household
10 that—

11 (A) earns an income below 200 percent of
12 the Federal poverty line,

13 (B) suffers from food insecurity,

14 (C) earns insufficient income to ensure
15 food security or economic security,

16 (D) lives in a rural, suburban, or urban
17 community that suffers from poverty, hunger,
18 or food insecurity,

19 (E) is homeless,

20 (F) receives (or recently received) assist-
21 ance under a State program funded under part
22 A of title IV of the Social Security Act (42
23 U.S.C. et seq.), relating to temporary assistance
24 to needy families,

1 (G) is eligible for benefits under any Fed-
 2 eral nutrition assistance program or Federal
 3 antipoverty program, or

4 (H) is formerly a youth in transition from
 5 foster care or the juvenile detention facilities.

6 (4) PARTNER NONPROFIT ORGANIZATION.—The
 7 term “partner nonprofit organization” means any
 8 national, regional, State, or local nonprofit group de-
 9 scribed in section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue
 10 Code of 1986 and exempt from tax under section
 11 501(a) of such Code.

12 **SEC. 4. HOPE ACCOUNTS PILOT PROJECTS.**

13 (a) PILOT PROJECTS AUTHORIZED.—The Secretaries
 14 shall allow eligible entities that apply to do so—based on
 15 an application to be created by the Secretaries—to carry
 16 out HOPE (Health, Opportunity, and Personal Empower-
 17 ment) Accounts Pilot Projects (in this section referred to
 18 as Projects) to enable target populations of individuals to
 19 establish through banks, credit unions, and any govern-
 20 mental or Tribal agencies HOPE accounts that enable
 21 such individuals—

22 (1) to have their paychecks deposited directly in
 23 such accounts,

24 (2) to use such accounts to increase savings
 25 that would be matched with funds provided by gov-

1 ernment and private sources, including individual de-
2 velopment accounts,

3 (3) to use an account app on a smart phone to
4 easily locate and sign-up for job training and place-
5 ment services online,

6 (4) to enable such individuals to use any smart
7 phone, tablet, or computer—

8 (A) to learn about the public and philan-
9 thropic programs that provide benefits to such
10 individuals, including aid to improve health, nu-
11 trition, job training and placement, housing, in-
12 come and to receive Federal and State tax cred-
13 its, and

14 (B) to apply for, submit eligibility docu-
15 ments for, enroll in, and manage the use of
16 such benefits at once through the convenience
17 of their device if individuals or their households
18 are eligible for 1 or more of such benefits,

19 (5) to receive a basic smart phone, tablet, or
20 computer, along with a subsidized internet Wi-Fi ac-
21 cess plan, if such individuals do not own a smart
22 phone, tablet, or computer,

23 (6) to obtain the access and information de-
24 scribed in paragraph (4) with assistance at libraries,
25 government offices, or nonprofit agencies if such in-

1 individuals are uncomfortable using internet tech-
2 nology themselves,

3 (7) to obtain access to the information de-
4 scribed in paragraph (4), with the assistance of gov-
5 ernment or nonprofit employees, AmeriCorps na-
6 tional service participants, or Senior Corps members,
7 to receive home visits if such individuals are elderly
8 or disabled,

9 (8) to access health care information that speci-
10 fies medical benefits, and any out-of-pocket costs,
11 for each of the health plans for which such individ-
12 uals may be eligible, and to empower them to easily
13 select the plan that works best for them,

14 (9) enable such individuals to file directly (and
15 without expending funds to obtain third-party tax
16 filing services) to obtain Federal tax credits and re-
17 funds, and in States and localities with their own
18 supplemental tax credits, to simultaneously file for
19 those,

20 (10) to deposit cash in the account that is set
21 aside for education, job training, starting a business,
22 or buying a home and that would be nontaxable,

23 (11) to easily access and monitor, in 1 central
24 online account—

1 (A) to be able to check the status,
2 amounts, and recertification deadlines for some
3 or all their benefits and savings, and

4 (B) to pay all bills online, saving high
5 check cashing fees and enormous amounts of
6 time,

7 (12) to budget their resources by using real-
8 time cash flow data and long-term financial planning
9 data, including calculating how much they would
10 lose in interest on credit cards versus how much
11 they would gain in interest by saving more,

12 (13) to access calendar and scheduling func-
13 tions that enable them to keep track of all job
14 search, work, family, and school obligations, as well
15 as any social service filing or appointment dates,

16 (14) to be protected by security and privacy
17 systems so that only such individuals, and not the
18 government, nonprofit, or banking partners would be
19 able to see or track private financial and appoint-
20 ment information, and

21 (15) notwithstanding other provisions of law, to
22 allow program applicants to easily and clearly au-
23 thorize their sharing of personal and financial infor-
24 mation with multiple government agencies, solely for

1 the purpose of those government agencies enabling
2 those to apply for and utilize government benefits.

3 (b) FISCAL YEARS.—Pilot projects authorized by
4 subsection (a) shall be carried out for a 1-year period in
5 each of the fiscal years 2021 through 2026.

6 **SEC. 5. HOPE ACTION PLANS PILOT PROJECTS.**

7 (a) PILOT PROJECTS AUTHORIZED.—The Secretaries
8 shall allow eligible entities that apply to do so—based on
9 an application to be created by the Secretaries—to carry
10 out HOPE Action Plans Pilot Projects to enable target
11 populations of individuals to partner with government and
12 nonprofit organizations by entering into voluntary agree-
13 ments to carry out long-term HOPE action plans that—

14 (1) specify exactly how the parties to such plans
15 will help such individuals and their families earn,
16 learn, and save better in order to ensure greater eco-
17 nomic opportunity for themselves and their children
18 by working together in a long-term, positive relation-
19 ship for the purpose of ensuring upward mobility,

20 (2) could empower such individuals and their
21 families to better organize their time and focus their
22 activities on productive endeavors while providing
23 them extra resources to do so,

1 (3) could be short-term, over just a year or 2,
2 and aimed at helping families achieve very basic
3 goals, such as avoiding homelessness and hunger,

4 (4) could be long-term with far more ambitious
5 goals for upward mobility, and

6 (5) would require that participating individuals
7 and families, government entities, and nonprofit
8 partners have equal rights to hold each other ac-
9 countable for plan outcomes and funding.

10 (b) FISCAL YEARS.—Pilot projects authorized by
11 subsection (a) shall be carried out in each of the fiscal
12 years 2021 through 2026.

13 **SEC. 6. COMPETITIVE GRANTS FOR PILOT PROJECTS.**

14 (a) APPLICATION FOR GRANT.—The Secretaries shall
15 each create grant application processes to competitively
16 make grants to eligible entities to aid target populations.
17 To be eligible to receive a grant for a fiscal year under
18 this section, eligible entities shall submit to the appro-
19 priate Secretary an application that contains a description
20 of how the applicant proposes to use the grant funds to
21 implement the components of the pilot projects authorized
22 by this section. Applications shall be submitted in such
23 form, at such time, and containing such other information
24 as the Secretaries may require.

1 (b) FORM OF GRANTS.—If a Secretary finds it appro-
2 priate, the Secretary may use cooperative agreements, as
3 described in section 6305 of title 31, United States Code,
4 for purposes of making grants under this section.

5 (c) AMOUNT OF GRANT.—Grants made under this
6 section shall range in amounts from \$250,000 to
7 \$3,000,000, and should be proportionate to the geo-
8 graphical size, project complexity, and number of individ-
9 uals participating in each project. Eligible entities may re-
10 ceive grants made under this section by 2 or more of the
11 Secretaries. To the extent funds are available, each Sec-
12 retary shall make not fewer than 8 such grants annually.

13 (d) DISTRIBUTION OF GRANTS.—To the extent prac-
14 ticable, the Secretaries shall make grants for pilot projects
15 that operate statewide, as well as pilot projects designed
16 to serve specific rural, urban, and suburban areas. To the
17 extent practicable, pilot projects for which grants are
18 made shall be distributed among diverse administrative re-
19 gions of Department of Housing and Urban Development,
20 the Department of Health and Human Services, and the
21 Department of Agriculture.

22 (e) PREFERENCE.—For purposes of making grants
23 under this section, preference shall be given for pilot
24 projects that—

- 1 (1) serve individuals in historically under-
- 2 served, high-poverty, rural and urban communities,
- 3 (2) simultaneously test both HOPE Accounts
- 4 and HOPE Action Plans,
- 5 (3) involve low-income individuals as equal part-
- 6 ners in project planning and implementation,
- 7 (4) make additional funds available directly to
- 8 low-income households through action plans, either
- 9 through government payments or through nonprofit
- 10 subgrantees,
- 11 (5) are matched by considerable non-Federal
- 12 funds without penalizing very-low income, under-
- 13 served rural and urban communities that cannot
- 14 provide non-Federal matching funds,
- 15 (6) propose concrete plans for long-term sus-
- 16 tainability and expansions without future Federal
- 17 grant funds,
- 18 (7) assist low-income households to apply for
- 19 the Federal earned income tax credits and State tax
- 20 credits,
- 21 (8) provide resources in both English and addi-
- 22 tional languages commonly spoken in that jurisdic-
- 23 tion,
- 24 (9) prioritize client-facing, fully tested, tech-
- 25 nology and mobile device applications,

1 (10) include a robust monitoring and evaluation
2 planning and reporting plan, including proposed
3 staffing and reporting for that plan, including re-
4 porting on the extent to which the pilot makes it
5 easier, quicker, and less costly for low-income Ameri-
6 cans to access a variety of benefits, the extent to
7 which the pilot will save administrative funds over
8 the long-run, the extent to which the accuracy and
9 integrity of the benefits programs included are main-
10 tained or improved, and the extent to which low-in-
11 come households are able to more easily obtain free
12 or low-cost banking services,

13 (11) subcontract part of the pilot project imple-
14 mentation work to United States-based private busi-
15 nesses, banks, savings and loans, credit unions, co-
16 ops and section 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations
17 with relevant, successful experience in similar or re-
18 lated project activities,

19 (12) incorporate a benefits calculator to enable
20 applicants to learn how the receipt of some benefits
21 might or might not impact whether they are eligible
22 for other benefits and might impact the amount of
23 those other benefits for which they are eligible,

1 (13) include planning and funding for the pilot
2 entities to train their staffs and clients to utilize the
3 new technologies,

4 (14) in rural and other areas without strong
5 broad-band service, integrate activities under this
6 grant with other activities to strengthen local-broad
7 band service,

8 (15) enable low-income Americans to obtain
9 free or reduced price smart phones and free or re-
10 duced-price data services,

11 (16) ensure that people without personal smart
12 phone, tablet, or computer access are able to benefit
13 from the systems and technological improvements in
14 the pilot projects at public locations such as public
15 libraries, community centers, and social service of-
16 fices,

17 (17) propose a detailed, workable plan to thor-
18 oughly beta test and field test any new technologies
19 or systems in this pilot before making them available
20 to all households, individuals, or the entire pilot
21 area, and

22 (18) identify the applicable Federal, State,
23 local, or Tribal statutory and regulatory authorities,
24 including waiver authorities, to be potentially lever-

1 aged to most effectively implement the proposed
2 pilot project.

3 **SEC. 7. HOPE TECHNOLOGY INNOVATION CONTRACTS.**

4 (a) **AUTHORITY.**—The Secretary of Health and
5 Human Services, in consultation with the Secretary of Ag-
6 riculture and the Secretary of Housing and Urban Devel-
7 opment, shall hold a merit-based competition to award
8 HOPE Technology Innovation Contracts to United States-
9 based private businesses and section 501(c)(3) nonprofit
10 organizations with relevant, successful experience in tech-
11 nology, to create technology apps, widgets, and templates
12 that pilot entities can use to create HOPE accounts.

13 (b) **NUMBER OF CONTRACTS.**—The Secretary will
14 award no more than 10 and not fewer than 2 such con-
15 tracts each fiscal year.

16 (c) **SIZE OF CONTRACTS.**—Contracts may range in
17 size from \$200,000 to \$4,500,000.

18 (d) **AVAILABILITY TO THE PUBLIC.**—All technologies
19 developed with these funds will be open-sourced and avail-
20 able to the public for free.

21 (e) **HOUSEHOLD DATA.**—No contractor should have
22 access to any client or household data through this project,
23 except in cases they are also contractors or subgrantees
24 for pilot entities, in which case they would have limited,

1 functional access to such data. In no case shall a con-
2 tractor share or sell client or household data.

3 (f) PREFERENCES.—Preferences should be given to
4 contracts that ensure the following:

5 (1) Client facing technology with top pref-
6 erences mobile device applications and uses and sec-
7 ondary preferences to tablet and computer and
8 texting uses.

9 (2) Incorporate fail-safe systems to maintain
10 the privacy and security of data.

11 (3) Are easily adaptable at the lowest possible
12 financial costs with the least possible staff time by
13 pilot entities and other State, county, city, munic-
14 ipal, and Tribal governments in a manner that can
15 easily be utilized by low-income Americans.

16 (4) Build in the ability to be easily updated as
17 technologies evolve.

18 **SEC. 8. MAINTENANCE OF EFFORT AND NONDISPLACE-**
19 **MENT OF WORKERS.**

20 None of the pilot projects carried out under this Act
21 shall do any of the following:

22 (1) Decrease the overall monetary value of Fed-
23 eral, State, local, or Tribal government funding as-
24 sistance given to any individual or family, although

1 all entities involved could independently, or jointly,
2 increase funding under such projects.

3 (2) Decrease the overall Federal, State, local, or
4 Tribal government funding for antipoverty programs
5 spent by participating pilot communities and agen-
6 cies, although all entities involved may independ-
7 ently, or jointly, increase funding.

8 (3) Lengthen the amount of time or increase
9 the requirements necessary to receive any govern-
10 ment benefits, or in any way make it more difficult
11 to obtain any form of government assistance.

12 (4) Limit the legal rights of anyone in the tar-
13 get populations to receive government or nonprofit
14 assistance.

15 (5) Decrease overall public sector employment
16 in any eligible pilot community, but public employees
17 could be transferred at similar or higher salaries and
18 pay grades from positions that oversee paperwork to
19 positions that provide direct services to the public,
20 assuming such transfers do not violate collective bar-
21 raging agreements or their other rights as public
22 employees.

23 (6) Decrease or increase work requirements for
24 existing government programs.

1 (7) Reduce program integrity measures or in-
2 crease the possibility of fraud in any government
3 program.

4 (8) Track or monitor the physical location or
5 immigration status of immigrants, be used for any
6 immigration enforcement activity against any indi-
7 viduals, or be used to provide any data whatsoever
8 to agencies involved in immigration enforcement ac-
9 tivities or policy.

10 (9) Enable any pilot entity or contractor, sub-
11 contractor, or partner of any pilot entity to share or
12 sell client or household data obtained through those
13 projects.

14 (10) Eliminate the existing ability of applicants
15 to apply for, recertify, or manage government bene-
16 fits by physically visiting a government office.

17 **SEC. 9. ANNUAL REPORTS TO CONGRESS.**

18 (a) REPORT.—Not later than September 30 of each
19 of fiscal years 2021 through 2027, the Secretaries shall
20 submit to Congress a report on the results of pilot projects
21 carried out under this Act.

22 (b) CONTENTS OF REPORT.—The report should in-
23 clude detailed data on the extent to which the pilot makes
24 it easier, quicker, and less costly for low-income Americans
25 to access a variety of benefits, the extent to which the pilot

1 will save administrative funds over the long-run, the extent
2 to which the accuracy and integrity of the benefits pro-
3 grams included are maintained or improved, and the ex-
4 tent to which low-income households are able to more eas-
5 ily obtain free or low-cost banking services.

6 **SEC. 10. AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS; TECH-**
7 **NICAL ASSISTANCE AUTHORIZED.**

8 (a) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There is
9 authorized to be appropriated to carry out this Act for
10 each of the fiscal years 2021 through 2026—

11 (1) \$10,000,000 to the Secretary of Housing
12 and Urban Development, of which \$500,000 shall be
13 used internally by the Department of Housing and
14 Urban Development for staff and other expenses to
15 plan, award, and oversee pilot projects under this
16 Act and \$9,500,000 shall be available for grants
17 under section 6,

18 (2) \$10,000,000 to the Secretary of Agri-
19 culture, of which \$500,000 shall be used internally
20 by Department of Agriculture for staff and other ex-
21 penses to plan, award, and oversee pilot projects
22 under this Act and \$9,500,000 shall be available for
23 grants under section 6, and

24 (3) \$15,000,000 to the Secretary of Health and
25 Human Services, of which \$500,000 shall be used

1 internally by the Department of Health and Human
2 Services for staff and other expenses to plan, award,
3 and oversee pilot projects under this Act and
4 \$9,500,000 shall be available for grants under sec-
5 tion 6, and 5,000,000 shall be available for contracts
6 under section 7.

7 (b) TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AUTHORIZED.—The
8 Secretary of Health and Human Services, the Secretary
9 of Agriculture, the Secretary of Housing and Urban De-
10 velopment, the Secretary of Veterans of Affairs, the Sec-
11 retary of the Interior, the Secretary of Labor, the Com-
12 missioner of the Internal Revenue Service, the Chief Exec-
13 utive Officer of the Corporation for National and Commu-
14 nity Service, the Administrator of the Small Business Ad-
15 ministration, the Director of the Office of Management
16 and Budget, the Office of Science and Technology, the
17 Chairman of the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation,
18 and the Domestic Policy Council may—

- 19 (1) provide technical assistance,
20 (2) solicit voluntary, nonmonetary assistance
21 from universities, credit unions, and private sector
22 technology companies, banks, and financial institu-
23 tions, and

1 (3) inform eligible entities of the applicable
2 Federal, State, local, or Tribal statutory and regu-
3 latory authorities, including waiver authorities,
4 to advance the objectives of the pilot projects carried out
5 under this Act.

6 (c) PERSISTENT POVERTY COUNTIES.—

7 (1) ALLOCATION REQUIREMENT.—Of the
8 amount appropriated to carry out this Act, at least
9 10 percent shall be allocated to provide assistance in
10 persistent poverty counties.

11 (2) DEFINITION.—For purposes of this section,
12 the term “persistent poverty counties” means any
13 county that has had 20 percent or more of its popu-
14 lation living in poverty over the past 30 years, as
15 measured by the 1990, 2000, and 2010 decennial
16 censuses.

○