

119TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

S. 2306

To amend the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act to create a new national program to support mid-career workers in reentering the STEM workforce, by providing funding to small- and medium-sized STEM businesses so the businesses can offer paid internships or other returnships that lead to positions above entry level.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

JULY 16, 2025

Ms. ROSEN (for herself, Mrs. HYDE-SMITH, and Mr. KELLY) introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions

A BILL

To amend the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act to create a new national program to support mid-career workers in reentering the STEM workforce, by providing funding to small- and medium-sized STEM businesses so the businesses can offer paid internships or other returnships that lead to positions above entry level.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

1 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

2 This Act may be cited as the “STEM Restoring Em-
3 ployment Skills through Targeted Assistance, Re-entry,
4 and Training Act” or the “STEM RESTART Act”.

5 **SEC. 2. RETURNING SKILLED WORKERS TO THE STEM**
6 **WORKFORCE.**

7 (a) IN GENERAL.—Subtitle D of title I of the Work-
8 force Innovation and Opportunity Act is amended—

9 (1) by redesignating section 172 (29 U.S.C.
10 3227) as section 173; and

11 (2) by inserting after section 171 the following:

12 **“SEC. 172. GRANTS TO SUPPORT SKILLED WORKERS IN RE-**
13 **TURNING OR TRANSITIONING TO THE STEM**
14 **WORKFORCE.**

15 “(a) PURPOSES.—The purposes of this section are
16 to—

17 “(1) prioritize expanding opportunities, through
18 high-quality internships or other returnships in
19 STEM fields for unemployed or underemployed
20 workers, particularly workers from rural areas, who
21 are mid-career skilled workers seeking to return or
22 transition to in-demand industry sectors or occupa-
23 tions within the STEM workforce, at positions and
24 compensation above entry level; and

25 “(2) establish grant funding and other incen-
26 tives for small-sized and medium-sized companies in

1 in-demand industry sectors or occupations to estab-
2 lish programs that provide on-the-job evaluation,
3 education, and training for mid-career skilled work-
4 ers described in paragraph (1).

5 “(b) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

6 “(1) MEDIUM-SIZED ENTERPRISE.—The term
7 ‘medium-sized’, used with respect to an enterprise,
8 means an entity that employs more than 499 and
9 fewer than 10,000 employees.

10 “(2) RESTART GRANT.—The term ‘RE-
11 START grant’ means a grant made under sub-
12 section (c).

13 “(3) RETURNSHIP.—The term ‘returnship’ shall
14 mean any internship, apprenticeship, re-entry oppor-
15 tunity, direct hiring opportunity with support, or
16 other similar opportunity designed to provide work-
17 ers seeking to return or transition to the STEM
18 workforce with positions that—

19 “(A) are above entry level;

20 “(B) provide salaries, stipends, or other
21 payments, and benefits, that are above entry
22 level; and

23 “(C) provide training that leads workers
24 toward full-time careers and provides pathways
25 toward advancement and leadership.

1 “(4) RURAL AREA.—The term ‘rural area’
2 means an area that is not an urban area (within the
3 meaning of the notice of final program criteria enti-
4 tled ‘Urban Area Criteria for the 2010 Census’ (76
5 Fed. Reg. 53030 (August 24, 2011))).

6 “(5) SMALL-SIZED ENTERPRISE.—The term
7 ‘small-sized’, used with respect to an enterprise,
8 means an entity that employs more than 49 and
9 fewer than 500 individuals.

10 “(6) STEM.—The term ‘STEM’ has the mean-
11 ing given the term in section 2 of the America COM-
12 PETES Reauthorization Act of 2010 (42 U.S.C.
13 6621 note).

14 “(7) UNEMPLOYED OR UNDEREMPLOYED INDI-
15 VIDUAL.—The term ‘unemployed or underemployed
16 individual’ means—

17 “(A) an unemployed or underemployed in-
18 dividual as defined by the Bureau of Labor Sta-
19 tistics; and

20 “(B) a displaced or furloughed worker.

21 “(c) GRANT.—

22 “(1) IN GENERAL.—From the amounts made
23 available to carry out this section, the Secretary
24 shall award grants, on a competitive basis, to eligible
25 entities, to carry out returnship programs that pro-

1 vide opportunities above entry level in STEM fields
2 for mid-career skilled workers, and achieve the pur-
3 poses described in subsection (a).

4 “(2) PERIODS.—The Secretary shall award the
5 grants for an initial period of not less than 3 years
6 and not more than 5 years.

7 “(3) AMOUNTS.—In awarding grants under this
8 subsection, the Secretary shall award a grant—

9 “(A) for a small-sized enterprise, in an
10 amount so that each annual payment for the
11 grant is not less than \$100,000 or more than
12 \$1,000,000; and

13 “(B) for a medium-sized enterprise or con-
14 sortium, in an amount so that each annual pay-
15 ment for the grant is not less than \$500,000 or
16 more than \$5,000,000.

17 “(d) ELIGIBILITY.—

18 “(1) ELIGIBLE ENTITIES.—To be eligible to re-
19 ceive a RESTART grant under this section, an enti-
20 ty shall—

21 “(A)(i) be located in the United States and
22 have significant operations and employees with-
23 in the United States;

24 “(ii) not be a debtor in a bankruptcy pro-
25 ceeding, within the meaning of section

1 4003(c)(3)(D)(i)(V) of the CARES Act (15
 2 U.S.C. 9042(c)(3)(D)(i)(V)) or under a State
 3 bankruptcy law; and

4 “(iii) be within an in-demand industry sec-
 5 tor or occupation in a STEM field; and

6 “(B) be—

7 “(i) a small-sized enterprise;

8 “(ii) a medium-sized enterprise; or

9 “(iii) a consortium of small-sized or
 10 medium-sized enterprises.

11 “(2) ELIGIBLE PROVIDERS.—

12 “(A) IN GENERAL.—An eligible entity that
 13 desires to partner with a provider in order to
 14 carry out a returnship program under this sec-
 15 tion shall enter into an arrangement with an el-
 16 igible provider.

17 “(B) PROVIDER.—To be eligible to enter
 18 into such an arrangement, a provider—

19 “(i) may or may not directly employ
 20 skilled workers in STEM fields but—

21 “(I) shall have expertise in
 22 human resources-related activities,
 23 such as identifying or carrying out
 24 staffing with skilled workers; and

1 “(II) shall be capable of pro-
2 viding high-quality education and
3 training services; and

4 “(ii) may be—

5 “(I)(aa) an institution of higher
6 education (as defined in section 101
7 of the Higher Education Act of 1965
8 (20 U.S.C. 1001)); or

9 “(bb) a non-degree-granting in-
10 stitution that is governed by the same
11 body that governs an institution of
12 higher education described in item
13 (aa);

14 “(II) a public, private for-profit,
15 or private nonprofit service provider,
16 approved by the local board;

17 “(III) a joint labor-management
18 organization;

19 “(IV) an eligible provider of
20 adult education and literacy activities
21 under title II; or

22 “(V) an established nonprofit or-
23 ganization that conducts research or
24 provides training on technical and em-
25 ployability skills and knowledge

1 aligned to the needs of adult learners
2 and workers.

3 “(e) APPLICATIONS.—

4 “(1) IN GENERAL.—To be eligible to receive a
5 RESTART grant to carry out a returnship program,
6 an entity shall submit an application to the Sec-
7 retary at such time and in such manner as the Sec-
8 retary may reasonably require.

9 “(2) CONTENTS.—Such an application shall in-
10 clude—

11 “(A) a description of the demand for
12 skilled workers in STEM fields and how the
13 RESTART grant will be used to help meet that
14 demand;

15 “(B) a description of how the program will
16 lead to employment of unemployed or under-
17 employed individuals, particularly workers from
18 rural areas, who seek to return or transition to
19 the STEM workforce;

20 “(C) if the entity has entered into or plans
21 to enter into an arrangement with an eligible
22 provider as described in subsection (d)(2) to
23 carry out a returnship program, information
24 identifying the eligible provider, and a descrip-
25 tion of how the arrangement will help the entity

1 build the knowledge and skills of skilled workers
2 participating in the program;

3 “(D) a description of how the eligible enti-
4 ty will develop and establish, or expand, a
5 returnship program that adds to the number of
6 full-time employees employed by the entity, but
7 does not displace full-time employees currently
8 (as of the date of submission of the application)
9 employed by the entity;

10 “(E) an assurance that any new or exist-
11 ing returnship program developed and estab-
12 lished, or expanded, with the grant funds will
13 last for at least 10 weeks and provide com-
14 pensation to participants in the form of a sal-
15 ary, stipend, or other payment, and benefits,
16 that are offered to full-time employees with
17 equivalent experience and expertise, such as
18 health care or child care benefits; and

19 “(F) if the returnship program leads to a
20 recognized postsecondary credential, informa-
21 tion on the quality of the program that leads to
22 the credential.

23 “(3) PRIORITY.—In making grants under this
24 section, the Secretary shall give priority to entities
25 who are proposing programs that prioritize

1 returnships for workers in in-demand industry sec-
2 tors or occupations, according to the State board or
3 from rural areas.

4 “(f) USE OF FUNDS.—

5 “(1) IN GENERAL.—An entity that receives a
6 grant under this section shall use the grant funds to
7 carry out a returnship program, of not less than 10
8 weeks, through which the entity provides for—

9 “(A) the education and training of
10 returnship participants; and

11 “(B) the services of existing employees (as
12 of the date the program begins) of the entity
13 who are working with returnship participants in
14 an educational, training, or managerial role, to
15 maximize the retention rate and effectiveness of
16 the returnship program.

17 “(2) SPECIFIC USES.—The grant funds may be
18 used—

19 “(A) to pay for the evaluation, and entry
20 into the program, and education and training of
21 returnship participants, including payment for
22 the duration of the program for the participants
23 for—

24 “(i) equipment, travel, and (as nec-
25 essary) housing;

1 “(ii) mentorship and career coun-
2 seling; and

3 “(iii) salaries, stipends, or payments,
4 and benefits, described in subsection
5 (e)(2)(E);

6 “(B) to supplement, and not supplant, the
7 compensation of those existing employees of the
8 entity who are directly supporting a returnship
9 program through the work described in para-
10 graph (1)(B); and

11 “(C) to enter into an arrangement with an
12 eligible provider to carry out a returnship pro-
13 gram.

14 “(3) EXISTING EMPLOYEES.—Not more than
15 20 percent of the grant funds may be used to pro-
16 vide compensation for the existing employees per-
17 forming the work described in paragraph (1)(B).

18 “(4) COORDINATION WITH STATE BOARDS.—An
19 entity that receives a grant under this section shall
20 coordinate activities with the State board established
21 under section 101, to ensure collaboration and align-
22 ment of workforce programs.

23 “(g) REPORTING AND EVALUATION REQUIRE-
24 MENTS.—

1 “(1) REPORT TO THE SECRETARY.—An entity
2 that receives a grant under this section for a
3 returnship program shall prepare, certify the con-
4 tents of, and submit to the Secretary an annual re-
5 port containing data regarding—

6 “(A) the total number of the participants,
7 and the number of such participants
8 disaggregated by sex, race, and ethnicity;

9 “(B) the total number of the participants
10 transitioned into full-time employment, and the
11 number of such transitioned participants
12 disaggregated by sex, race, and ethnicity; and

13 “(C) if the returnship program includes
14 participants in an internship, the conversion
15 rate of the internship participants to employees,
16 for the total number of those participants and
17 the conversion rate of those participants
18 disaggregated by sex, race, and ethnicity.

19 “(2) EVALUATION AND REPORT BY THE SEC-
20 RETARY.—Not later than 180 days after receiving
21 the annual reports from grant recipients under para-
22 graph (1), the Secretary shall—

23 “(A)(i) prepare a report that presents the
24 data collected through the reports, including
25 data disaggregated by sex, race, and ethnicity,

1 and an evaluation based on that data of the
 2 best practices for effectively implementing
 3 returnship (including internship) programs; and

4 “(ii) submit the report to the Committee
 5 on Education and Workforce of the House of
 6 Representatives, and the Committee on Health,
 7 Education, Labor, and Pensions of the Senate;
 8 and

9 “(B) post information on a website on best
 10 practices described in subparagraph (A)(i).

11 “(h) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There
 12 is authorized to be appropriated to the Secretary to carry
 13 out this section \$50,000,000 for each of fiscal years 2026
 14 through 2030.”.

15 (b) TABLE OF CONTENTS.—The table of contents in
 16 section 1(b) of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity
 17 Act is amended—

18 (1) by redesignating the item relating to section
 19 172 as the item relating to section 173; and

20 (2) by inserting after the item relating to sec-
 21 tion 171 the following:

“Sec. 172. Grants to support skilled workers in returning or transitioning to
 the STEM workforce.”.

22 (c) CONFORMING AMENDMENT.—Section 8041(g)(2)
 23 of the Substance Use–Disorder Prevention that Promotes
 24 Opioid Recovery and Treatment for Patients and Commu-

1 nities Act (29 U.S.C. 3225a(g)(2)) is amended in subpara-
2 graph (C), by striking “172(f)” and inserting “173(f)”.

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