

119TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

S. 5364

To support rural families.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

AUGUST 7, 2026

Mrs. HYDE-SMITH introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions

A BILL

To support rural families.

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 “Rural Mothers and
5 Fathers Choice Act”.

6 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS AND PURPOSE.**

7 (a) FINDINGS.—Congress finds the following:

8 (1) After generations of unfair policies, failing
9 academics, poor health outcomes, and struggling
10 economies, many residents of rural communities
11 across the United States feel trapped in a system
12 that puts additional burdens on its citizens.

1 (2) Children entering kindergarten who live in
2 rural communities often face barriers due to lower
3 incomes and lack of access to quality early childhood
4 education providers. These barriers increase the
5 chance that rural children may be categorized as
6 academically under prepared.

7 (3) According to the Bipartisan Policy Center,
8 the economic impact of the childcare gap in rural
9 areas falls between \$32,790,000,000 and
10 \$49,930,000,000. This lack of childcare options
11 makes it more difficult for rural parents to return
12 to work.

13 (4) Schools attended by rural students offer
14 limited access to advanced coursework, offering less
15 science, technology, engineering, and mathematics
16 (referred to in this Act as “STEM”) teaching capac-
17 ity and fewer STEM extracurricular activities. In
18 turn, rural students are significantly less likely to
19 enroll in STEM degree programs at the college level.

20 (5) According to the National Student Clearing-
21 house, only 55 percent of rural students enrolled in
22 college directly out of high school in 2022, compared
23 with 64 percent of suburban students and 59 per-
24 cent of urban students. Also, only 80 percent of col-
25 lege students from rural communities continue their

1 higher education into the second year, compared
2 with 85 percent of suburban students and 81 per-
3 cent of urban students.

4 (6) Longitudinal studies of academic growth in-
5 dicate the increased importance of summer academic
6 opportunities for rural children, who suffer larger
7 academic “summer loss” than non-rural students.
8 As a result, while rural students start kindergarten
9 slightly ahead of non-rural students, they fall behind
10 by middle school, according to the American Edu-
11 cational Research Association.

12 (7) Due to the lack of high-quality educational
13 supports in rural schools, rural students who strug-
14 gle to read are less likely to catch up than non-rural
15 students. According to the University of New Hamp-
16 shire, the average reading achievement of a rural
17 third grader who scores in the tenth percentile of
18 reading achievement in kindergarten is approxi-
19 mately 6 to 7 points lower than the reading achieve-
20 ment of the average suburban and urban third grad-
21 er with comparable kindergarten achievement and
22 socioeconomic background.

23 (8) Between the 2017–2018 and 2021–2022
24 school years, chronic absenteeism increased 47 per-

1 cent among rural students, compared to 44 percent
2 for students in urban districts.

3 (9) According to the Health Resources & Serv-
4 ices Administration, rural children are less likely to
5 have one or more preventive medical and dental vis-
6 its in the past 12 months (59.6 percent) than urban
7 children (66.7 percent). This disparity holds at all
8 levels of household income. Rural children are also
9 more likely to be overweight or obese (36 percent)
10 relative to urban children (31.6 percent).

11 (10) According to the American College of Edu-
12 cation, job training program completion rates vary
13 significantly between urban and rural areas. Rural
14 populations face additional barriers due to geo-
15 graphic isolation, limited broadband access, fewer
16 job training options and smaller training cohorts
17 that restrict program availability. Rural community
18 colleges often struggle to maintain enough enroll-
19 ment to offer identical certifications.

20 (11) Roughly 1 in 7 public high school students
21 fails to earn their high school diploma in 4 years. A
22 16- to 24-year-old coming from a high-income family
23 is about 7 times as likely to have completed high
24 school as a 16- to 24-year-old coming from a low-
25 income family.

1 (12) The average national cost to confine a
2 youth in a juvenile justice facility is \$214,620 per
3 year. Comparatively, per pupil annual spending for
4 a student in kindergarten through grade 12 is only
5 \$17,620, however spending in States with largely
6 rural populations tends to be in the \$13,000–
7 \$11,000 range per student.

8 (b) PURPOSE.—The purpose of this Act is to estab-
9 lish a 10-year, place-based Federal program designed to
10 strengthen families in rural and tribal communities by
11 providing resources to enhance educational and employ-
12 ment choices that strengthen communities, including by—

13 (1) promoting evidence-based literacy and aca-
14 demic success, including through—

15 (A) kindergarten readiness;

16 (B) reading and mathematics proficiency;

17 (C) improving school attendance and re-
18 ducing chronic absenteeism;

19 (D) on-time high school graduation; and

20 (E) alignment of career and technical edu-
21 cation pathways with local work opportunities;

22 (2) empowering family choice, including
23 through—

1 (A) supporting household income, employ-
 2 ment, and financial stability through meaning-
 3 ful workforce development;

4 (B) childcare and after-school programs to
 5 support working parents;

6 (C) broadband-enabled access to telehealth
 7 and mobile health services;

8 (D) distance learning opportunities for
 9 workforce development;

10 (E) transportation support for childcare
 11 and career stability; and

12 (F) emphasis on the role of the mother
 13 and father in the family; and

14 (3) returning control of services to the States,
 15 including through—

16 (A) durable rural service networks across
 17 education, health, workforce, and early child-
 18 hood sectors;

19 (B) mental and behavioral health services;

20 (C) substance use recovery supports;

21 (D) child abuse prevention and services;

22 (E) support for rural businesses and eco-
 23 nomic growth;

24 (F) data systems and shared dashboards;

25 and

1 (G) healthcare and child care workforces.

2 **SEC. 3. DEFINITIONS.**

3 In this Act:

4 (1) **HUB AND SPOKE SITE.**—The term “hub
5 and spoke site” means central, permanent facilities
6 (referred to as a “hub site”) operated by an eligible
7 entity from which services funded under this Act are
8 coordinated and delivered to families in the service
9 area on an ongoing basis, and affiliated locations
10 (each referred to as a “spoke site”), which may in-
11 clude mobile units, partner facilities, schools, health
12 clinics, or other community locations, through which
13 the eligible entity or partners of the eligible entity
14 deliver a subset of those services to families in the
15 service area. An eligible entity may operate more
16 than one hub and spoke site within its service area.

17 (2) **ELIGIBLE ENTITY.**—The term “eligible enti-
18 ty” means—

19 (A) a lead entity that is—

20 (i) a nonprofit organization that—

21 (I) has its headquarters in a
22 rural area; and

23 (II) has not less than 10 years of
24 positive measurable outcomes with re-

1 spect to one or more activities de-
 2 scribed in section 2(b); or

3 (ii) a Tribal government or organiza-
 4 tion authorized by a Tribal government to
 5 serve as a lead entity for carrying out a
 6 grant under this Act; and

7 (B) continuous active partners, which may
 8 include—

9 (i) a nonprofit organization or govern-
 10 mental agency serving students in kinder-
 11 garten through grade 12;

12 (ii) an early childcare provider (de-
 13 fined as an early childhood education pro-
 14 gram under section 103 of the Higher
 15 Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1003));

16 (iii) a health or behavioral healthcare
 17 provider;

18 (iv) an economic development agency;

19 or

20 (v) a local or Tribal government.

21 (3) FAMILY SUPPORT HUB.—The term “family
 22 support hub” means a location that provides family-
 23 based services, including services described in section
 24 4(c)(1), that are provided by the lead entity or a
 25 partner entity of the eligible entity receiving funds

1 under this Act. A hub site may serve as a family
2 support hub.

3 (4) RURAL AREA.—The term “rural area”
4 means—

5 (A) a micropolitan urban area of 10,000 to
6 49,999 residents or a rural tract outside of an
7 urban area, as provided by the United States
8 Department of Agriculture;

9 (B) a county that has a population of less
10 than 50,000 people; or

11 (C) lands designated as tribal or frontier
12 counties.

13 (5) SECRETARY.—The term “Secretary” means
14 the Secretary of Health and Human Services.

15 **SEC. 4. GRANT PROGRAM AUTHORIZED; USES OF FUNDS.**

16 (a) PROGRAM AUTHORIZED.—

17 (1) IN GENERAL.—From amounts appropriated
18 to carry out this Act, the Secretary shall award
19 planning and implementation grants to eligible enti-
20 ties to enable those eligible entities to carry out the
21 activities described in this section.

22 (2) RESERVATION OF FUNDS.—From amounts
23 appropriated to carry out this Act, the Secretary
24 shall reserve 10 percent for such planning and im-

1 plementation grants for eligible entities described in
2 section 3(2)(A)(ii).

3 (3) ADMINISTRATIVE COSTS.—

4 (A) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall re-
5 serve not less than 5 percent and not more than
6 7 percent of amounts appropriated to carry out
7 this Act for the costs of administration, evalua-
8 tion, and technical assistance.

9 (B) TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PROVIDER.—

10 From the amounts reserved under subpara-
11 graph (A), not less than 30 percent shall be
12 used to award a grant, on a competitive basis,
13 to a single national entity to serve as the tech-
14 nical assistance provider for program grantees.
15 Such entity shall have—

16 (i) a strong national record of sup-
17 porting communities in improving child
18 and student outcomes through place-based
19 strategies;

20 (ii) a nationally accessible technology
21 platform for efficiently scaling capabilities
22 of place-based implementation;

23 (iii) an externally validated framework
24 for building cross sector partnerships re-

1 sulting in better outcomes for children and
 2 families; and

3 (iv) experience supporting the diverse
 4 needs of rural and Tribal place-based part-
 5 nerships.

6 (4) ALLOCATION BETWEEN PLANNING AND IM-
 7 PLEMENTATION.—Of the amounts appropriated
 8 under section 10 for a fiscal year and remaining
 9 after the reservation of funds under paragraph (3),
 10 the Secretary shall allocate 10 percent for planning
 11 grants awarded under subsection (b) and 90 percent
 12 for implementation grants awarded under subsection
 13 (c). The reservation in paragraph (2) shall be ap-
 14 plied proportionally within each of the planning
 15 grant and implementation grant funding allocations.

16 (b) PLANNING GRANTS.—The Secretary shall award
 17 not more than 3 planning grants to eligible entities for
 18 a 12-month period, in an amount equal to not more than
 19 \$500,000 each, to enable eligible entities receiving a plan-
 20 ning grant to—

21 (1) develop goals, objectives, and activities;
 22 (2) collect baseline data; and
 23 (3) secure necessary partnerships and agree-
 24 ments.

1 (c) IMPLEMENTATION GRANTS.—The Secretary shall
 2 award not more than 6 implementation grants to eligible
 3 entities for a 10-year period, in an amount equal to
 4 \$6,000,000 each per year (subject to appropriations and
 5 performance requirements). An eligible entity that receives
 6 an implementation grant under this section shall use grant
 7 funds over a 10-year period to carry out activities through
 8 hub and spoke sites in not fewer than 4 of the 6 categories
 9 listed in paragraphs (1) through (6), including not less
 10 than 1 activity under paragraph (2) or (3) and not less
 11 than 1 activity under paragraph (4) or (5):

12 (1) Support fixed or mobile family support
 13 hubs, which shall include one or more of the fol-
 14 lowing:

15 (A) Carrying out case management serv-
 16 ices and providing referrals to support family
 17 choices in the pursuit of meeting a family’s edu-
 18 cational, health, and workforce needs.

19 (B) Conducting home visits to help fami-
 20 lies develop plans to reach their personal goals,
 21 and providing family outreach to support activi-
 22 ties to meet those goals.

23 (C) Providing parenting and caregiver
 24 guidance to empower parental choice.

1 (D) Providing mental health and substance
2 use disorder screening or treatment.

3 (E) Providing telehealth services to remote
4 communities.

5 (F) Providing legal or financial counseling.

6 (2) Support early childhood services, which
7 shall include one or more of the following:

8 (A) Improving infant or toddler capacity at
9 childcare sites within the service area.

10 (B) Family, friend, and neighbor caregiver
11 support systems to raise individual awareness of
12 options in support of informed family choices.

13 (C) Coordinating services across State,
14 local, and provider networks to reduce duplica-
15 tion and improve efficiencies.

16 (D) Providing transportation for childcare
17 access.

18 (3) Supports for students in kindergarten
19 through grade 12, either in school or after school,
20 which shall include one or more of the following:

21 (A) Evidence-based literacy programming
22 and tutoring services.

23 (B) Attendance interventions.

24 (C) Tutoring in reading or mathematics.

25 (D) After-school programming.

1 (E) Career and technical education vertical
2 alignment with workforce partners.

3 (F) School-based mental health services.

4 (4) Economic mobility activities, which shall in-
5 clude one or more of the following:

6 (A) Apprenticeships and work-based learn-
7 ing, except that participation in a Department
8 of Labor Registered Apprenticeship shall not be
9 required.

10 (B) Childcare-linked training.

11 (C) Small business coaching.

12 (D) Workforce training.

13 (5) Health access services, which shall include
14 one or more of the following:

15 (A) Community health workers.

16 (B) Evidence-based substance use disorder
17 treatment.

18 (C) Maternal safety bundles, as determined
19 by the Secretary of Health and Human Serv-
20 ices.

21 (D) Mobile and tele-health services.

22 (6) Infrastructure enablers, which shall include
23 one or more of the following:

24 (A) Broadband hotspots.

25 (B) Local data systems.

1 (C) Partnerships with transportation com-
 2 panies to increase availability.

3 (D) Childcare facility upgrades.

4 (E) Driver's education and transportation
 5 vouchers.

6 (d) WAIVER.—The Secretary may waive the require-
 7 ment in subsection (c) to address not fewer than 4 cat-
 8 egories of activities if—

9 (1) an applicant demonstrates in the application
 10 that the eligible entity serves an extremely high-need
 11 or tribal area; and

12 (2) the Secretary finds that a narrower set of
 13 activities will more effectively achieve the stated pro-
 14 gram outcomes.

15 **SEC. 5. FAMILY GOVERNANCE AND COMMUNITY ENGAGE-**
 16 **MENT.**

17 (a) IN GENERAL.—Each eligible entity receiving a
 18 grant under this Act shall establish a Family Advisory
 19 Council, which shall consist of not less than 7 members,
 20 not less than 40 percent of whom shall be parents or care-
 21 givers who reside in the area that will be served by the
 22 eligible entity through the grant under this Act.

23 (b) DUTIES.—Each Family Advisory Council shall
 24 vote on recommendations regarding the budget and plans

1 of the eligible entity regarding the activities carried out
2 with a grant under this Act.

3 **SEC. 6. APPLICATION; SELECTION CRITERIA.**

4 (a) APPLICATION.—An eligible entity desiring to re-
5 ceive a grant under this Act shall submit an application
6 to the Secretary not later than 45 days after the publica-
7 tion of a Notice of Funding Availability. The Secretary
8 shall publish a Notice of Funding Availability not later
9 than 120 days after the date of enactment of this Act,
10 and, to the extent practicable, not earlier than 60 days
11 after such date, and shall award grants not later than 120
12 days after the close of the application period. Applications
13 shall contain such information as the Secretary may re-
14 quire, including, at a minimum, each of the following:

- 15 (1) Abstract.
- 16 (2) Proposal Narrative.
- 17 (3) Organizational Capacity.
- 18 (4) Work Plan.
- 19 (5) Budget and Budget Justification.
- 20 (6) Letters of Commitment and Support.
- 21 (7) Staffing Plan.

22 (b) SELECTION.—In selecting eligible entities to re-
23 ceive an implementation grant or planning grant, the Sec-
24 retary shall consider the following, with the following per-
25 centages of weighted consideration:

1 (1) Need (20 percent).

2 (2) Family engagement and governance (10
3 percent).

4 (3) Integrated service plan (15 percent).

5 (4) Workforce and partner capacity (10 per-
6 cent).

7 (5) Prior experience and evidence of capability
8 (25 percent).

9 (6) Evidence use and literacy alignment (10
10 percent).

11 (7) Sustainability and match strategy (10 per-
12 cent).

13 (c) PRIORITY.—In selecting eligible entities to receive
14 a grant under this Act, the Secretary shall give priority
15 to eligible entities that—

16 (1) are located in counties with a population of
17 less than 50,000 people; or

18 (2) serve communities that are classified as dis-
19 tressed by the Economic Innovation Group, as of the
20 date of enactment of this Act, or as subsequently
21 updated by the Economic Innovation Group's Dis-
22 tressed Communities Index.

1 **SEC. 7. PERFORMANCE DATA AND EVALUATION; REPORT-**
2 **ING.**

3 (a) GRANT PERIOD.—An implementation grant
4 under this Act shall be for a 10-year period, if the eligible
5 entity receiving the grant successfully completes a per-
6 formance review under this section after year 3 and year
7 6 of the grant period.

8 (b) REPORTING.—Not less than twice per year, each
9 eligible entity that receives a grant under this Act shall
10 prepare and submit to the Secretary a report that con-
11 tains, at a minimum, the following information with re-
12 spect to the populations served by the eligible entity using
13 grant funds:

14 (1) Data about household income, employment,
15 and food security.

16 (2) Data about developmental screening, kin-
17 dergarten readiness, and childcare availability and
18 affordability.

19 (3) Data about chronic absenteeism in elemen-
20 tary and secondary school, literacy rates in grade 3,
21 mathematics proficiency rates in grade 8, and high
22 school graduation rates.

23 (4) Data about illegal substance use, depend-
24 ency recovery engagement, avoidable emergency de-
25 partment visits, and maternal health indicators.

1 **SEC. 8. FUNDING.**

2 (a) **MATCHING FUNDS.—**

3 (1) **IN GENERAL.**—Subject to paragraph (2),
4 each eligible entity that receives an implementation
5 grant awarded under this Act shall—

6 (A) have zero matching requirement for
7 years 1 through 3 of the grant period;

8 (B) contribute an amount equal to 10 per-
9 cent of the amount of such grant funds for
10 years 4 through 6 of the grant period; and

11 (C) contribute an amount equal to 20 per-
12 cent of the amount of such grant funds for
13 years 7 through 10 of the grant period.

14 (2) **CASH OR IN-KIND.**—Matching requirements
15 may be met through cash or in kind contributions.

16 (b) **SUPPLEMENT NOT SUPPLANT.**—An eligible enti-
17 ty shall use Federal funds received under this Act only
18 to supplement the funds that would, in the absence of such
19 Federal funds, be made available from other Federal,
20 State, and local sources to carry out activities under this
21 Act, and not to supplant such funds.

22 (c) **FLEXIBILITY.**—An eligible entity receiving a
23 grant under this Act may coordinate funds received under
24 this Act with funds received under programs administered
25 by the Department of Education, the Department of
26 Health and Human Services, the Department of Agri-

1 culture, the Department of Justice, and the Department
2 of Labor, provided that such funds are used in a manner
3 that is consistent with the requirements of each applicable
4 program and that grant funds under this Act are used
5 in accordance with the supplement-not-supplant require-
6 ment under subsection (c).

7 **SEC. 9. AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.**

8 There are authorized to be appropriated to carry out
9 this Act such sums as may be necessary for fiscal year
10 2027 and each of the following 9 fiscal years.

○