

OFFICE OF RURAL AFFAIRS ENHANCEMENT ACT

AUGUST 15, 2025.—Committed to the Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union and ordered to be printed

Mr. WILLIAMS of Texas, from the Committee on Small Business, submitted the following

R E P O R T

together with

MINORITY VIEWS

[To accompany H.R. 4549]

The Committee on Small Business, to whom was referred the bill (H.R. 4549) to amend the Small Business Act to clarify the responsibilities of the Office of Rural Affairs of the Small Business Administration, and for other purposes, having considered the same, reports favorably thereon without amendment and recommends that the bill do pass.

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I. PURPOSE AND BILL SUMMARY

On July 21, 2025, Rep. Goodlander, along with Rep. Wied and Rep. Golden, introduced H.R. 4549, the *Office of Rural Affairs Enhancement Act*. H.R. 4549 codifies the role of the Assistant Administrator to serve as the head of the Office of Rural Affairs.

II. NEED FOR LEGISLATION

H.R. 4549 codifies the SBA Office of Rural Affairs and is crucial to ensuring consistent and targeted support for rural entrepreneurs, who often face unique challenges such as limited access to capital. By setting clear qualification standards for leadership in the Office, the bill strengthens accountability and focus in addressing rural economic development.

The Office’s mandate to promote favorable policies, conduct outreach events, and collaborate with SBA Resource Partners, such as Small Business Development Centers, ensures a proactive approach to reaching rural small businesses. Furthermore, regular reporting to Congress on activities and service gaps provides transparency and enables data-driven improvements. This will ultimately help to close the opportunity gap between urban and rural small businesses.

III. HEARINGS

On February 5, 2025, the Committee on Small Business held a hearing examining matters related to H.R. 4549 entitled “Hope on the Horizon: Prioritizing Small Business Growth in the 119th Congress.”

IV. COMMITTEE CONSIDERATION

The Committee on Small Business met in open session, with a quorum being present, on July 22, 2025, and ordered H.R. 4549 to be reported favorably to the House of Representatives by a roll call vote of 23 ayes to 0 nos. During the markup no amendments were offered on this bill.

V. COMMITTEE VOTES

Clause 3(b) of rule XIII of the Rules of the House of Representatives requires the Committee to list the recorded votes on the motion to report legislation and amendments thereto. The Committee voted to favorably report H.R. 4549 to the House of Representatives at 11:05 AM ET.

Present	Representatives	Aye	Nay
	Mr. Stauber (MN-08)	X	
	Mr. Meuser (PA-09)	X	
	Ms. Van Duyne (TX-24)		
	Mr. Elzey (TX-06)	X	
	Mr. Alford (MO-04)	X	
	Mr. LaLota (NY-01)	X	
	Mr. Finstad (MN-01)	X	
	Mr. Wied (WI-08)	X	
	Mr. Bresnahan (PA-08)	X	
	Mr. Jack (GA-03)	X	
	Mr. Downing (MT-02)	X	
	Ms. King-Hinds (Del.-CNMI)	X	
	Mr. Schmidt (KS-02)	X	
	Mr. Patronis (FL-01)	X	
	Ranking Member Velazquez (NY-07)		
	Mr. McGarvey (KY-03)	X	
	Ms. Scholten (MI-03)	X	
	Ms. McIver (NJ-10)	X	
	Mr. Cisneros (CA-31)	X	
	Ms. Morrison (MN-03)		
	Mr. Latimer (NY-16)	X	
	Mr. Tran (CA-45)	X	
	Ms. Simon (CA-12)	X	
	Mr. Olszewski (MD-02)	X	
	Mr. Conaway (NJ-03)	X	
	Ms. Goodlander (NH-02)	X	
	Chairman Williams (TX-25)		
0	TOTALS	23	0

COMMITTEE ON SMALL BUSINESS119th Congress (*First Session*)

Date: 07/22/2025 _____

Time: 11:05 AM ET _____

Measure: H.R. 4549 – Office of Rural Affairs Enhancement Act

Offered By: _____

Amendment #: _____

Result?	<u>Agreed To:</u> [X]		
	<u>Not Agreed To:</u> []		
	<u>Withdrawn:</u> []		
<i>Voice Vote</i>	<i>Ayes</i>	<i>Nays</i>	<i>Present</i>
	23	0	0

FC Vote #	5
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VI. SECTION-BY-SECTION OF H.R. 4549

Section 1—Short title

This act may be cited as the “Office of Rural Affairs Enhancement Act.”

Section 2—Office of Rural Affairs of the Small Business Administration

This section establishes an Assistant Administrator to oversee the Office of Rural Affairs. The Assistant Administrator will promote policies and programs of the SBA and other federal agencies to assist rural small businesses.

The section is changed to have the Office of Rural Affairs coordinate with the successor of the now-defunct United States Tourism and Travel Administration, the National Travel and Tourism Office of the Department of Commerce.

The Office will be responsible for hosting webinars and outreach events for rural small businesses and inviting various stakeholders, including district offices, resource partners, and state and local governments to participate.

A report is due within 180 days of enactment and annually thereafter on the activities of the Office and will include the name of the Assistant Administrator, the budget of the Office, the number of full-time employees of the Office, a summary of outreach activities, analysis of lending programs in serving rural small businesses, and information gathered from webinars and outreach events.

Additionally, this section defines key terms mentioned throughout the bill.

VII. CONGRESSIONAL BUDGET OFFICE COST ESTIMATE

Pursuant to 3(c)(3) of rule XIII of the Rules of the House of Representatives, the Committee adopts as its own the cost estimate prepared by the Director of the Congressional Budget Office pursuant to section 402 of the Congressional Budget Act of 1974. At the time this report was filed, the Committee has requested but not received a cost estimate from the Director of the Congressional Budget Office.

VIII. NEW BUDGET AUTHORITY, ENTITLEMENT AUTHORITY,
AND TAX EXPENDITURES

Pursuant to clause 3(c)(2) of rule XIII of the Rules of the House of Representatives and section 308(a)(I) of the Congressional Budget Act of 1974, the Committee provides the following opinion and estimate with respect to new budget authority, entitlement authority, and tax expenditures. While the Committee has not received an estimate of new budget authority contained in the cost estimate prepared by the Director of the Congressional Budget Office pursuant to section 402 of the Congressional Budget Act of 1974, the Committee does not believe that there will be any new or increased costs attributable to this legislation.

IX. OVERSIGHT FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

In accordance with clause 2(b)(1) of rule X and clause 3(c)(1) of rule XIII of the Rules of the House of Representatives, the oversight findings and recommendations of the Committee on Small Business with respect to the subject matter contained in H.R. 4549 are incorporated into the descriptive portions of this report.

X. PERFORMANCE GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

With respect to the requirements of clause 3(c)(4) of rule XIII of the Rules of the House of Representatives, the goal of H.R. 4549 is to codify the Assistant Administrator role in the SBA Office of Rural Affairs and provide qualification requirements.

XI. STATEMENT OF DUPLICATION OF FEDERAL PROGRAMS

Pursuant to clause 3(c)(5) of rule XIII of the Rules of the House of Representatives, no provision of H.R. 4549 is known to be duplicative of another Federal program, including any program that was included in a report to Congress pursuant to section 21 of Public Law 111-139 or the most recent Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance.

XII. CONGRESSIONAL EARMARKS, LIMITED TAX BENEFITS, AND LIMITED TARIFF BENEFITS

With respect to clause 9 of rule XXI of the Rules of the House of Representatives, the Committee finds that the bill does not contain any congressional earmarks, limited tax benefits, or limited tariff benefits as defined in clause 9(e), 9(f), or 9(g) of rule XXI of the Rules of the House of Representatives.

XIII. FEDERAL MANDATES STATEMENT

The Committee adopts as its own the estimate of Federal mandates prepared by the Director of the Congressional Budget Office pursuant to section 423 of the Unfunded Mandates Reform Act.

XIV. FEDERAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE STATEMENT

No advisory committees within the meaning of section 5(b) of the Federal Advisory Committee Act were created by this legislation.

XV. APPLICABILITY TO LEGISLATIVE BRANCH

The Committee finds that the legislation does not relate to the terms and conditions of employment or access to public services or accommodations within the meaning of section 102(b)(3) of the Congressional Accountability Act.

XVI. STATEMENT OF CONSTITUTIONAL AUTHORITY

Pursuant to clause 7 of rule XII of the Rules of the House, the Committee finds that the authority for this legislation in Art. I, § 8, cl. 1 of the Constitution of the United States.

XVII. CHANGES IN EXISTING LAW MADE BY THE BILL, AS REPORTED

In compliance with clause 3(e) of rule XIII of the Rules of the House of Representatives, changes in existing law made by the bill, as reported, are shown as follows (existing law proposed to be omitted is enclosed in black brackets, new matter is printed in italics, and existing law in which no change is proposed is shown in roman):

CHANGES IN EXISTING LAW MADE BY THE BILL, AS REPORTED

In compliance with clause 3(e) of rule XIII of the Rules of the House of Representatives, changes in existing law made by the bill, as reported, are shown as follows (existing law proposed to be omitted is enclosed in black brackets, new matter is printed in italics, and existing law in which no change is proposed is shown in roman):

SMALL BUSINESS ACT

* * * * *

SEC. 26. OFFICE OF RURAL AFFAIRS.

(a) There is hereby established in the Small Business Administration an Office of Rural Affairs (hereafter in this section referred to as the "Office").

[(b) The Office shall be headed by a director who shall be appointed by the Administrator not later than 90 days after the date of the enactment of this section.]

(b) APPOINTMENT OF ASSISTANT ADMINISTRATOR.—

(1) *IN GENERAL.*—*The Office shall be administered by an Assistant Administrator, who shall be an employee in the competitive service.*

(2) *QUALIFICATIONS.*—*The Assistant Administrator shall—*

(A) *have education or professional experience with, or knowledge of, rural affairs and issues relating to small business concerns; and*

(B) *have experience providing development assistance to rural small business concerns.*

(c) The Office shall—

(1) strive to achieve an equitable distribution of the financial assistance available from the Administration for [small business concerns located in rural areas] *rural small business concerns*;

(2) to the extent practicable, compile annual statistics on rural areas, including statistics concerning the population, poverty, job creation and retention, unemployment, business failures, and business startups;

(3) [provide information] *promote* to industries, organizations, and State and local governments [concerning the assistance available to rural small business concerns through the Administration and through other Federal departments and agencies;] *on the policies and programs of the Administration and of other Federal departments and agencies for assisting rural small business concerns*;

(4) provide information to industries, organizations, educational institutions, and State and local governments con-

cerning programs administered by private organizations, educational institutions, and Federal, State, and local governments which improve the economic opportunities of rural citizens[; and];

(5) work with [the United States Tourism and Travel Administration] *the National Travel and Tourism Office of the Department of Commerce* to assist [small businesses in rural areas] *rural small business concerns* with tourism promotion and development[.]; and

(6) *host webinars and outreach events for rural small business concerns as described in subsection (d).*

(d) *OUTREACH.—The Assistant Administrator shall—*

(1) *host webinars and outreach events in various regions of the United States for rural small business concerns; and*

(2) *invite representatives from district offices of the Administration, resource partners, Federal and State agencies, and other interested persons to participate in such webinars and outreach events.*

(e) *REPORT.—*

(1) *IN GENERAL.—Not later than 180 days after the date of the enactment of this subsection, and annually thereafter, the Administrator shall submit to the Committee on Small Business of the House of Representatives and the Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship of the Senate, and make publicly available on a website of the Administration, a report on the activities of the Office during the one-year period immediately preceding the date of submission of the report.*

(2) *CONTENTS.—Each report required under paragraph (1) shall include the following:*

(A) *The operational details of the Office, including the name of the Assistant Administrator, the budget of the Office, and the number of full-time employees employed by or detailed to the Office.*

(B) *A summary of the activities conducted under subsection (c).*

(C) *The number of webinars and outreach events conducted by the Administration to promote policies and programs described in paragraph (3) of subsection (c) and to provide information described in paragraph (4) of such subsection.*

(D) *An analysis of the lending programs of the Administration in serving the needs of rural small business concerns.*

(E) *Information gathered from any webinars and outreach events conducted by the Administration during the period covered by the report.*

(f) *DEFINITIONS.—In this section:*

(1) *ASSISTANT ADMINISTRATOR.—The term “Assistant Administrator” means the Assistant Administrator of the Office of Rural Affairs appointed under subsection (b).*

(2) *RESOURCE PARTNERS.—The term “resource partners” means—*

(A) *small business development centers;*

(B) *women’s business centers (described under section 29);*

(C) chapters of the Service Corps of Retired Executives (established under section 8(b)(1)(B)); and

(D) Veteran Business Outreach Centers (described under section 32).

(3) RURAL SMALL BUSINESS CONCERN.—The term “rural small business concern” means a small business concern located in a rural area (as defined in section 7(b)(16) of this Act).

* * * * *

XVIII. MINORITY VIEWS

Small businesses are powerful drivers of economic growth across the United States. From the first quarter of 2021 to the second quarter of 2024, small businesses were responsible for 52.8 percent of the total net job creation in the United States.¹ Small businesses are the primary source of jobs in America's rural communities, and they have a higher percentage of self-employed individuals relative to urban areas.² However, small rural businesses face greater challenges, including access to affordable capital, unreliable internet access, and access to talent.³

The Small Business Administration (SBA) Office of Rural Affairs (the Office) can play a key role in helping small rural businesses overcome these challenges. The Office was created in 1990 to provide information and assistance to small rural businesses. The responsibilities of the Office include compiling statistics on rural areas and small business concerns, distributing SBA financial assistance programs equitably, providing information to stakeholders, and working with the National Travel and Tourism Office to assist small businesses in rural areas.

Unfortunately, the Office has either been dormant or the collateral duty of a Regional Administrator for a vast majority of the time since its establishment. In early 2020, an acting director was named, and additional staff was hired with funding from the *CARES Act*. In 2021, the SBA appointed a permanent, full-time career deputy director to stand up the Office.

It is important for the Office to actively help small rural businesses deal with the challenges facing them today. With clear lines of communication and the additional outreach that will come from the Office, small businesses will be able to better access resources that should readily be available to them. Furthermore, the Office will play a role in being able to receive feedback from the small business community that will allow the federal government insight into how to best use resources to support small businesses.

NYDIA M. VELÁZQUEZ,
Ranking Member.



¹*Small Businesses Continue to Outpace Large Businesses in Job Creation*, U.S. BUREAU OF LAB. STATS. (Jun. 23, 2025), <https://www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2025/small-businesses-continue-to-outpace-large-businesses-in-job-creation.htm>.

²Joe Thiel, *The Challenges of Rural Entrepreneurship and Some Solutions*, STARTUPNATION (Jul. 2, 2024), <https://startupnation.com/start-your-business/challenges-rural-entrepreneurship-solutions-thiel>.

³*Id.*