

Public Law 102-551
102d Congress

An Act

Oct. 28, 1992

[H.R. 5954]

An Act to amend the Food, Agriculture, Conservation, and Trade Act of 1990 to improve health care services and educational services through telecommunications, and for other purposes.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. IMPROVEMENT OF HEALTH CARE SERVICES AND EDUCATIONAL SERVICES THROUGH TELECOMMUNICATIONS.

(a) **PROGRAMS FOR CONSORTIA IN QUALIFIED LOCAL EXCHANGE SERVICE AREAS.**—Chapter 1 of subtitle D of title XXIII of the Food, Agriculture, Conservation, and Trade Act of 1990 (7 U.S.C. 950aaa et seq.) is amended by adding at the end the following new section:

Urban and rural
areas.
7 USC 950aaa-5.

“SEC. 2335A. SPECIAL HEALTH CARE AND DISTANCE LEARNING PROGRAM FOR QUALIFIED SERVICE AREAS.

“(a) **DEVELOPMENT OF CONSORTIA.**—The Administrator shall encourage the development of consortia to provide health care services or educational services through telecommunications in rural areas of a qualified local exchange carrier service area. Each consortium shall be composed of—

“(1) a tertiary care facility, rural referral center, medical teaching institution, or educational institution accredited by the State;

“(2) any number of institutions that provide health care services or educational services; and

“(3) not less than three rural hospitals, clinics, community health centers, migrant health centers, local health departments, or similar facilities, or not less than three educational institutions accredited by the State.

“(b) SPECIAL PROGRAM FOR QUALIFIED LOCAL EXCHANGE CARRIER SERVICE AREAS.—

“(1) **REGULATIONS AND SPECIAL PROGRAM.**—Through regulations issued not later than 190 days after the date of enactment of this section, the Administrator shall establish a program under which qualified consortia described in subsection (a) located within qualified local exchange carrier service areas may apply to the Administrator for grants to support the costs of activities involved in the sending and receiving of information that will improve the delivery of health care services or educational services through telecommunications in rural areas.

“(2) **SELECTION OF GRANTEES.**—The Administrator shall—

“(A) establish application procedures;

“(B) review the applications submitted under this subsection in a timely manner; and

“(C) make grants in accordance with this subsection and with regulations issued by the Administrator.

“(3) **PRIORITIES.**—

"(A) IN GENERAL.—Priority for grants under this subsection shall be accorded applicants whose applications and plans demonstrate—

"(i) the greatest likelihood of successfully and efficiently carrying out the activities described in the application and the plan of the applicant;

"(ii) the greatest likelihood of improving health care services or educational services in the rural areas;

"(iii) coordination between local exchange carriers to carry out activities as described in the application; and

"(iv) unconditional financial support from each affected local community.

"(B) GEOGRAPHIC DIVERSITY.—In awarding grants, the Administrator shall seek to achieve geographic diversity among the grantees.

"(4) MAXIMUM AMOUNT OF GRANT.—The amount of each grant awarded under this subsection shall not exceed \$1,500,000.

"(5) DISTRIBUTION OF GRANTS.—Grants to a qualified consortium under this subsection shall be disbursed over a period of not more than 3 years.

"(6) USE OF FUNDS.—

"(A) IN GENERAL.—Grants under this subsection may be used to support the costs of activities involving the sending and receiving of information to improve health care services or educational services in rural areas, including—

"(i) in the case of grants to improve health care services—

"(I) consultations between health care providers;

"(II) transmitting and analyzing x rays, lab slides, and other images;

"(III) developing and evaluating automated claims processing, and transmitting automated patient records; and

"(IV) developing innovative health professions education programs;

"(ii) in the case of grants to improve educational services—

"(I) developing innovative education programs and expanding curriculum offerings;

"(II) providing continuing education to all members of the community;

"(III) providing means for libraries of educational institutions or public libraries to share resources;

"(IV) providing the public with access to State and national data bases;

"(V) conducting town meetings; and

"(VI) covering meetings of agencies of State government; and

"(iii) in all cases—

"(I) transmitting financial information; and

"(II) such other related activities as the Administrator considers to be consistent with the purposes of this section.

"(7) LIMITATION ON ACQUISITION OF INTERACTIVE TELECOMMUNICATIONS EQUIPMENT.—Not more than 40 percent of the amount of any grant made under this subsection may be used to acquire interactive telecommunications end user equipment.

"(8) LIMITATION ON USE OF CONSULTANTS.—Not more than 5 percent of the amount of any grant made under this subsection may be used to employ or contract with any consultant or similar person.

"(9) PROHIBITIONS.—Grants made under this subsection may not be used, in whole or in part, to establish or operate a telecommunications network or to provide any telecommunications services for hire.

"(c) EXPEDITED TELEPHONE LOANS.—Local exchange carriers located in a qualified local exchange carrier service area shall be eligible to apply for expedited loans under the Rural Electrification Act of 1936 (7 U.S.C. 901 et seq.). The Administrator shall respond to a completed application for such a loan no later than 45 days after receipt. The Administrator shall notify the applicant in writing of its decision regarding each such application.

"(d) DEFINITION.—As used in this section, the term 'qualified local exchange carrier service area' means the service area of a local telephone exchange carrier in which the local exchange carrier has a plan approved by the Administrator for upgrading and modernizing the rural telecommunications infrastructure of the service area. The plan shall—

"(1) provide for eliminating party line service within the local exchange carrier service area and for other improvements and modernization in rural telephone service;

"(2) provide for the enhancement of the availability of educational opportunities or the availability of improved medical care through telecommunications;

"(3) encourage and improve the use of telecommunications, computer networks, and related advanced technologies to provide educational and medical benefits to people in rural areas; and

"(4) provide for the achievement of the goals described in subparagraphs (A) through (C) not later than 10 years after the approval of the plan."

(b) EXTENSION OF CHAPTER 1.—Notwithstanding any other provision of law, chapter 1 of subtitle D of title XXIII of the Food, Agriculture, Conservation and Trade Act of 1990 (7 U.S.C. 950aaa et seq.), including the amendments made by this section, shall be effective until September 30, 1997.

(c) ALLOCATION OF FUNDS.—Section 2335(b) of the Food, Agriculture, Conservation, and Trade Act of 1990 (7 U.S.C. 950aaa-4) is amended by adding at the end the following new paragraph:

"(8) USE OF APPROPRIATED FUNDS.—

"(A) IN GENERAL.—Subject to subparagraph (B), the Administrator shall make available—

"(i) 50 percent of the funds made available pursuant to paragraph (3) for grants for end users that are consortia participating in the special program established under section 2335A; and

Termination
date.
7 USC 950aaa
note.

“(ii) 50 percent of the funds made available pursuant to paragraph (3) to provide funds for the programs, and end users participating in the programs, authorized by sections 2331 through 2335.

“(B) RELEASE OF FUNDS.—Not earlier than April 1 and not later than May 1 of each year, the Administrator shall make such funds described in subparagraph (A) as remain unobligated, available for any purpose described in subparagraph (A).”

(d) EFFECT OF AMENDMENTS.—The amendments made by this section shall not apply to funds appropriated for fiscal year 1993 to carry out subtitle D of title XXIII of the Food, Agriculture, Conservation, and Trade Act of 1990 (7 U.S.C. 950aaa et seq.) or require the revision of any regulation proposed to carry out such subtitle during fiscal year 1993.

7 USC 950aaa-4
note.

Approved October 28, 1992.

LEGISLATIVE HISTORY—H.R. 5954:

HOUSE REPORTS: No. 102-943 (Comm. on Agriculture).

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Sept. 29, considered and passed House.

Oct. 5, considered and passed Senate, amended. House concurred in Senate amendment.