

118TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

H. R. 9953

To establish a Federal returnship program to strengthen the Federal workforce and to ease re-entry into the workforce for individuals who have taken time away from work, and for other purposes.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

OCTOBER 8, 2024

Ms. WEXTON (for herself, Ms. NORTON, Ms. LOIS FRANKEL of Florida, Ms. McCLELLAN, Mr. RASKIN, and Mr. TRONE) introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Oversight and Accountability

A BILL

To establish a Federal returnship program to strengthen the Federal workforce and to ease re-entry into the workforce for individuals who have taken time away from work, and for other purposes.

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 “Return USA Act”.

5 **SEC. 2. PURPOSE; FINDINGS.**

6 (a) PURPOSE.—It is the purpose of this Act to estab-
7 lish a pilot returnship program for Federal civilian em-
8 ployment to expand opportunities in the Federal civilian

1 service for experienced, highly qualified mid-career profes-
2 sionals who are seeking to return to the workforce after
3 a career break.

4 (b) FINDINGS.—Congress finds as follows:

5 (1) To best represent and serve communities
6 across the United States, it is critical that the Fed-
7 eral Government is able to attract and retain the
8 best and brightest to its workforce.

9 (2) According to the 2022 Federal Workforce
10 Priorities Report, the Office of Personnel Manage-
11 ment has identified several key areas for workforce
12 development to ensure the highly skilled and special-
13 ized Federal workforce can meet emerging needs.

14 (3) Returnship programs, which help highly
15 qualified, highly skilled mid-career professionals to
16 re-enter the workforce after a career break, are uti-
17 lized at over one-third of Fortune 50 companies to
18 help meet workforce needs, according to an analysis
19 by iRelaunch as of 2023.

20 (4) In April 2021, the State of Utah founded
21 the first public returnship program in the United
22 States (Return Utah) to meet workforce needs for
23 mid-level State government positions.

24 (5) Returnship programs are often used to
25 strengthen opportunities for underrepresented popu-

1 lations, including women who only represent 45 per-
2 cent of the Federal workforce at large and 40 per-
3 cent of senior executive positions, according to the
4 Office of Personnel Management.

5 (6) Many parents, primarily women, leave the
6 workforce when they have young children or aging
7 loved ones and struggle to re-enter.

8 (7) According to data from the career platform
9 LinkedIn, approximately 43 percent more women list
10 a career break on their profile than men, and the
11 most commonly cited reason for taking a career
12 break was child care.

13 (8) The “motherhood penalty”, the loss of in-
14 come, difficulty re-entering the workforce, and slow-
15 er career progression faced by mothers in the work-
16 force, can have a devastating impact on women and
17 the workforce and economy at large.

18 (9) Following the birth of their first child, on
19 average, nearly 25 percent of women will leave the
20 workforce in the first year, and 17 percent will re-
21 main out of the workforce after 5 years.

22 (10) Some experts estimate that the “mother-
23 hood penalty” is now the top driver of the gender
24 pay gap, as mothers experience a 60 percent reduc-

1 tion in earnings in the decade following the birth of
2 their first child compared to fathers.

3 **SEC. 3. RETURN USA PROGRAM.**

4 (a) IN GENERAL.—The Director of the Office of Per-
5 sonnel Management shall establish a Federal returnship
6 pilot program at one or more Federal agency. Such pro-
7 grams shall be known and designated as the “Return USA
8 Program”. The Program shall—

9 (1) target Federal civilian workforce needs; and

10 (2) assist professionals with at least 3 years of
11 prior work experience to re-enter the workforce, in
12 civil service positions that are above entry-level and
13 commensurate with their skills and experience, after
14 a career break of at least 1 year that was unrelated
15 to work performance or solely for the pursuit of ad-
16 ditional educational degrees, including a break due
17 to child or elder care, time after military service or
18 while a spouse was serving in the military service, or
19 personal health concerns.

20 (b) REQUIREMENTS.—The Program shall—

21 (1) draw upon best practices from existing
22 State and private sector returnship programs to in-
23 form the structure, supports, and implementation of
24 the Program;

1 (2) provide onboarding, training, mentorship,
2 and professional and leadership development oppor-
3 tunities to support and foster a Federal leadership
4 trajectory for participants;

5 (3) create cohorts of current and former Pro-
6 gram participants to foster community and support
7 systems;

8 (4) last no less than one year in duration for
9 each participant; and

10 (5) prioritize providing opportunities for under-
11 represented populations and, to the extent available,
12 provide wraparound supports, including child care.

13 (c) RECRUITMENT.—The Director shall work with
14 relevant public and private partners to recruit prospective
15 applicants, including creating a unique Program hiring
16 path on the website USAjobs.gov.

17 (d) CONVERSION.—The Director may convert any
18 participant who successfully completes the Program, as
19 determined by the Director, to a permanent appointment
20 in the competitive service without further competition.

21 (e) REPORTS TO CONGRESS.—At the end of each of
22 fiscal years 2025 through 2029, the Director shall submit
23 a report on the Program to the Committee on Oversight
24 and Accountability of the House of Representatives, the
25 Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Af-

1 fairs of the Senate, and the Committees on Appropriations
2 of the House of Representatives and the Senate. Each
3 such report shall include an overall description of the sta-
4 tus of the Program and key success metrics, including—

5 (1) the number of Program participants and
6 the aggregate demographic representation of Pro-
7 gram participants;

8 (2) the number of Program participants re-
9 tained in permanent, full-time positions following
10 completion of the Program, participant’s GS-level
11 following completion, and agency assignment, and
12 the aggregate demographic representation of Pro-
13 gram participants retained and not retained in per-
14 manent, full-time positions;

15 (3) opportunities to expand the returnship Pro-
16 grams into additional Federal agencies or depart-
17 ments; and

18 (4) impact of the Program on the strength and
19 diversity of the Federal workforce.

20 (f) DURATION.—

21 (1) IN GENERAL.—The Program shall operate
22 for a period of three years beginning on the date the
23 Director established the Program under subsection
24 (a). At the end of such period, the Director shall—

1 (A) determine whether the Program was
2 successful in hiring and retaining qualified can-
3 didates; and

4 (B) submit a report on such determination
5 to the Committee on Oversight and Account-
6 ability of the House of Representatives and the
7 Committee on Homeland Security and Govern-
8 mental Affairs of the Senate.

9 (2) APPLICATION.—If the Director determines
10 under paragraph (1)(A) that the Program was suc-
11 cessful, the Director shall continue to carry out the
12 Program. The Program shall be terminated on the
13 date of such determination if the Director deter-
14 mines that the Program was not successful.

15 (g) DEFINITIONS.—In this Act—

16 (1) the term “civil service” has the meaning
17 given that term in section 2101 of title 5, United
18 States Code;

19 (2) the term “competitive service” has the
20 meaning given that term in section 2102 of such
21 title 5;

22 (3) the term “Director” means the Director of
23 the Office of Personnel Management;

24 (4) the term “Program” means the Return
25 USA Program established under this Act; and

1 (5) the term “underrepresented populations”
2 means groups who have traditionally not had equal
3 access to economic opportunities because of discrimi-
4 nation or other societal barriers and could include
5 gender, race, ethnicity, disability, or low-income sta-
6 tus.

7 (h) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There is
8 authorized to be appropriated \$5,000,000 for each fiscal
9 year, beginning with fiscal year 2025, the Program is car-
10 ried out consistent with the determination under sub-
11 section (f)(1).

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