

117TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

S. 647

To improve the process for awarding grants under certain programs of the Department of Agriculture to certain counties in which the majority of land is owned or managed by the Federal Government and to other units of local government and Tribal governments in those counties, and for other purposes.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

MARCH 9, 2021

Ms. CORTEZ MASTO (for herself, Mr. RISCH, Mr. CRAPO, and Mr. DAINES) introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry

A BILL

To improve the process for awarding grants under certain programs of the Department of Agriculture to certain counties in which the majority of land is owned or managed by the Federal Government and to other units of local government and Tribal governments in those counties, 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,*

1 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

2 This Act may be cited as the “More Opportunities
3 for Rural Economies from USDA Grants Act” or the
4 “MORE USDA Grants Act”.

5 **SEC. 2. DEFINITIONS.**

6 In this Act:

7 (1) HIGH-DENSITY PUBLIC LAND COUNTY.—

8 The term “High-Density Public Land County”
9 means a county (or equivalent jurisdiction) of a
10 State or territory of the United States—

11 (A) that has a population of not more than
12 100,000 people, according to the most recent
13 annual estimates of population by the Bureau
14 of the Census; and

15 (B) in which more than 50 percent of the
16 land is owned or managed by the Federal Gov-
17 ernment.

18 (2) QUALIFYING GRANT PROGRAM.—The term
19 “qualifying grant program” means—

20 (A) the Rural Business Development grant
21 program established under section 310B(c) of
22 the Consolidated Farm and Rural Development
23 Act (7 U.S.C. 1932(c));

24 (B) the Economic Impact Initiative grant
25 program established under section
26 306(a)(20)(B) of the Consolidated Farm and

1 Rural Development Act (7 U.S.C.
2 1926(a)(20)(B));

3 (C) the Telemedicine and Distance Learn-
4 ing Services grant program established under
5 chapter 1 of subtitle D of title XXIII of the
6 Food, Agriculture, Conservation, and Trade Act
7 of 1990 (7 U.S.C. 950aaa et seq.);

8 (D) the Community Connect Grant Pro-
9 gram established under section 604 of the
10 Rural Electrification Act of 1936 (7 U.S.C.
11 950bb-3);

12 (E) the broadband loan and grant pilot
13 program known as the “Rural eConnectivity
14 Pilot Program” or the “ReConnect Program”,
15 authorized under section 779 of division A of
16 the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2018
17 (Public Law 115-141; 132 Stat. 399);

18 (F) any discretionary grant program of the
19 Rural Business-Cooperative Service, the Rural
20 Housing Service, the Rural Utilities Service, or
21 any other rural development agency of the De-
22 partment of Agriculture under which grants are
23 awarded to—

24 (i) counties;

25 (ii) other units of local government; or

1 (iii) Tribal governments; and

2 (G) any other discretionary grant program
3 of the Department of Agriculture under which
4 grants for rural development are awarded to—

5 (i) counties;

6 (ii) other units of local government; or

7 (iii) Tribal governments.

8 (3) SECRETARY.—The term “Secretary” means
9 the Secretary of Agriculture.

10 (4) TRIBAL GOVERNMENT.—The term “Tribal
11 government” means the recognized governing body
12 of any Indian or Alaska Native tribe, band, nation,
13 pueblo, village, community, component band, or com-
14 ponent reservation, individually identified (including
15 parenthetically) in the list published most recently as
16 of the date of enactment of this Act pursuant to sec-
17 tion 104 of the Federally Recognized Indian Tribe
18 List Act of 1994 (25 U.S.C. 5131).

19 **SEC. 3. GRANTS.**

20 (a) REDUCTION IN LOCAL MATCHING REQUIRE-
21 MENTS.—Notwithstanding any other provision of law,
22 with respect to a High-Density Public Land County and
23 any unit of local government or Tribal government within
24 a High-Density Public Land County, any requirement for

1 local matching funds under a qualifying grant program
2 shall be reduced by 50 percent.

3 (b) TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE.—On request of a High-
4 Density Public Land County or any unit of local govern-
5 ment or Tribal government within a High-Density Public
6 Land County, the Secretary shall provide additional tech-
7 nical assistance to the High-Density Public Land County,
8 unit of local government, or Tribal government before and
9 during the annual application period for each qualifying
10 grant program.

11 (c) PRIORITY.—

12 (1) APPLICATION APPROVAL.—In approving ap-
13 plications for a qualifying grant program, the Sec-
14 retary shall give priority to an application from a
15 High-Density Public Land County, unit of local gov-
16 ernment within a High-Density Public Land County,
17 or Tribal government within a High-Density Public
18 Land County that has not received support under
19 the qualifying grant program during the 10-year pe-
20 riod preceding the date of the application.

21 (2) TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND OTHER SUP-
22 PORT.—In carrying out subsections (b) and (d), the
23 Secretary may give priority to a Tribal government
24 within a High-Density Public Land County.

1 (d) OTHER SUPPORT.—The Secretary may provide
2 additional support, as the Secretary determines to be ap-
3 propriate, for a High-Density Public Land County or a
4 unit of local government or Tribal government within a
5 High-Density Public Land County, including by consid-
6 ering and, if appropriate, offering flexibility with respect
7 to any requirement of, or barrier to applying for or receiv-
8 ing assistance under, a qualifying grant program if the
9 requirement or barrier relates to—

10 (1) scoring criteria relating to numerical size
11 and impact, such as the number of jobs created or
12 the number of people served, which disadvantage
13 small and isolated communities;

14 (2) any requirement that an applicant for a
15 qualifying grant program partner with other institu-
16 tions, such as community colleges or foundations,
17 which may not operate in the jurisdiction of the
18 High-Density Public Land County, unit of local gov-
19 ernment, or Tribal government seeking assistance
20 under the qualifying grant program;

21 (3) any financial or cash-on-hand requirement
22 that a High-Density Public Land County or a unit
23 of local government or Tribal government within a
24 High-Density Public Land County cannot meet for
25 reasons other than any financial constraints to

1 which the High-Density Public Land County, unit of
2 local government, or Tribal government is subject; or
3 (4) an overly complicated or overly technical ap-
4 plication for a qualifying grant program that deters
5 High-Density Public Land Counties or units of local
6 government or Tribal governments within High-Den-
7 sity Public Land Counties from applying for the
8 qualifying grant program.

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