

116TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

S. _____

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

Ms. CORTEZ MASTO introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on _____

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,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

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

1 **SEC. 2. DEFINITIONS.**

2 In this Act:

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

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

7 (A) that has a population of not more than
8 100,000 people, according to the most recent
9 annual estimates of population by the Bureau
10 of the Census; and

11 (B) in which more than 50 percent of the
12 land is owned or managed by the Federal Gov-
13 ernment.

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

16 (A) the Rural Business Development grant
17 program established under section 310B(c) of
18 the Consolidated Farm and Rural Development
19 Act (7 U.S.C. 1932(c));

20 (B) the Economic Impact Initiative grant
21 program established under section
22 306(a)(20)(B) of the Consolidated Farm and
23 Rural Development Act (7 U.S.C.
24 1926(a)(20)(B));

25 (C) the Telemedicine and Distance Learn-
26 ing Services grant program established under

1 chapter 1 of subtitle D of title XXIII of the
2 Food, Agriculture, Conservation, and Trade Act
3 of 1990 (7 U.S.C. 950aaa et seq.);

4 (D) the Community Connect Grant Pro-
5 gram established under section 604 of the
6 Rural Electrification Act of 1936 (7 U.S.C.
7 950bb–3);

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

14 (F) any other discretionary grant program
15 of the Department of Agriculture under which
16 grants are awarded to—

17 (i) counties;

18 (ii) other units of local government; or

19 (iii) Tribal governments.

20 (3) SECRETARY.—The term “Secretary” means
21 the Secretary of Agriculture.

22 (4) TRIBAL GOVERNMENT.—The term “Tribal
23 government” means the recognized governing body
24 of any Indian or Alaska Native tribe, band, nation,
25 pueblo, village, community, component band, or com-

1 ponent reservation, individually identified (including
2 parenthetically) in the list published most recently as
3 of the date of enactment of this Act pursuant to sec-
4 tion 104 of the Federally Recognized Indian Tribe
5 List Act of 1994 (25 U.S.C. 5131).

6 **SEC. 3. GRANTS.**

7 (a) **REDUCTION IN LOCAL MATCHING REQUIRE-**
8 **MENTS.**—Notwithstanding any other provision of law,
9 with respect to a High-Density Public Land County and
10 any unit of local government or Tribal government within
11 a High-Density Public Land County, any requirement for
12 local matching funds under a qualifying grant program
13 shall be reduced by 50 percent.

14 (b) **TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE.**—On request of a High-
15 Density Public Land County or any unit of local govern-
16 ment or Tribal government within a High-Density Public
17 Land County, the Secretary shall provide additional tech-
18 nical assistance to the High-Density Public Land County,
19 unit of local government, or Tribal government before and
20 during the annual application period for each qualifying
21 grant program.

22 (c) **PRIORITY.**—

23 (1) **APPLICATION APPROVAL.**—In approving ap-
24 plications for a qualifying grant program, the Sec-
25 retary shall give priority to an application from a

1 High-Density Public Land County, unit of local gov-
2 ernment within a High-Density Public Land County,
3 or Tribal government within a High-Density Public
4 Land County that has not received support under
5 the qualifying grant program during the 10-year pe-
6 riod preceding the date of the application.

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

11 (d) OTHER SUPPORT.—The Secretary may provide
12 additional support, as the Secretary determines to be ap-
13 propriate, for a High-Density Public Land County or a
14 unit of local government or Tribal government within a
15 High-Density Public Land County, including by consid-
16 ering and, if appropriate, offering flexibility with respect
17 to any requirement of, or barrier to applying for or receiv-
18 ing assistance under, a qualifying grant program if the
19 requirement or barrier relates to—

20 (1) scoring criteria relating to numerical size
21 and impact, such as the number of jobs created or
22 the number of people served, which disadvantage
23 small and isolated communities;

24 (2) any requirement that an applicant for a
25 qualifying grant program partner with other institu-

1 tions, such as community colleges or foundations,
2 which may not operate in the jurisdiction of the
3 High-Density Public Land County, unit of local gov-
4 ernment, or Tribal government seeking assistance
5 under the qualifying grant program;

6 (3) any financial or cash-on-hand requirement
7 that a High-Density Public Land County or a unit
8 of local government or Tribal government within a
9 High-Density Public Land County cannot meet for
10 reasons other than any financial constraints to
11 which the High-Density Public Land County, unit of
12 local government, or Tribal government is subject; or

13 (4) an overly complicated or overly technical ap-
14 plication for a qualifying grant program that deters
15 High-Density Public Land Counties or units of local
16 government or Tribal governments within High-Den-
17 sity Public Land Counties from applying for the
18 qualifying grant program.