

119TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

S. 4628

To direct the Secretary of Agriculture to establish an initiative to address the availability, quality, and cost of childcare in rural areas, and for other purposes.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

MAY 21, 2026

Mr. MARSHALL (for himself, Ms. SMITH, Ms. HASSAN, and Ms. ERNST) introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry

A BILL

To direct the Secretary of Agriculture to establish an initiative to address the availability, quality, and cost of childcare in rural areas, 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. EXPANDING CHILDCARE IN RURAL AMERICA**
4 **INITIATIVE.**

5 (a) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

6 (1) CHILDCARE.—

7 (A) IN GENERAL.—The term “childcare”
8 means any program that—

1 (i) provides quality care and early
 2 education for children who have not yet en-
 3 tered first grade; and

4 (ii) is operated by—

5 (I) an eligible childcare provider
 6 described in section 658P(6)(A) of the
 7 Child Care and Development Block
 8 Grant Act of 1990 (42 U.S.C.
 9 9858n(6)(A)); or

10 (II) a childcare provider that, on
 11 the date of enactment of this Act—

12 (aa) is licensed, regulated,
 13 or registered in the State, terri-
 14 tory of the United States, or ter-
 15 ritory of the Indian Tribe in
 16 which the provider is located; and

17 (bb) meets applicable State,
 18 Tribal, territorial, and local
 19 health and safety requirements.

20 (B) INCLUSIONS.—The term “childcare”
 21 includes—

22 (i) a school-based program described
 23 in subparagraph (A);

24 (ii) a program described in subpara-
 25 graph (A) that is a Head Start program,

1 including a migrant and seasonal Head
2 Start program, or an American Indian and
3 Alaska Native Head Start program carried
4 out under the Head Start Act (42 U.S.C.
5 9831 et seq.);

6 (iii) a facility used for a program de-
7 scribed in subparagraph (A); and

8 (iv) a service provided under a pro-
9 gram described in subparagraph (A).

10 (2) INITIATIVE.—The term “Initiative” means
11 the Expanding Childcare in Rural America Initiative
12 established under subsection (b).

13 (3) RURAL AREA.—The term “rural area” has
14 the meaning given the term in section 343(a)(13)(A)
15 of the Consolidated Farm and Rural Development
16 Act (7 U.S.C. 1991(a)(13)(A)).

17 (4) SECRETARY.—The term “Secretary” means
18 the Secretary of Agriculture.

19 (b) ESTABLISHMENT.—The Secretary shall establish
20 an initiative, to be known as the “Expanding Childcare
21 in Rural America Initiative”, under which the Secretary
22 shall provide, for each of fiscal years 2027 through 2029,
23 priority in accordance with subsection (c) to address the
24 availability, quality, and cost of childcare in rural areas.

25 (c) CHILDCARE PRIORITIES.—

1 (1) IN GENERAL.—Notwithstanding any other
2 provision of law, in selecting recipients of loans and
3 grants under a program described in paragraph (2),
4 the Secretary shall give priority to any qualified ap-
5 plicant that proposes to use the loan or grant to ad-
6 dress the availability, quality, or cost of childcare in
7 a rural area.

8 (2) DESCRIPTION OF PROGRAMS.—The pro-
9 grams referred to in paragraph (1) are the following:

10 (A) The essential community facilities loan
11 and grant programs authorized under section
12 306(a) of the Consolidated Farm and Rural
13 Development Act (7 U.S.C. 1926(a)).

14 (B) The business and industry direct and
15 guaranteed loan program authorized under sec-
16 tion 310B(g) of that Act (7 U.S.C. 1932(g)).

17 (C) The rural microentrepreneur assistance
18 program authorized under section 379E of that
19 Act (7 U.S.C. 2008s).

20 (D) The intermediary relending program
21 authorized under section 310H of that Act (7
22 U.S.C. 1936b).

23 (d) REQUIREMENT.—In providing funding in accord-
24 ance with the Initiative, the Secretary shall ensure a bal-

1 anced geographical distribution of the benefits under the
2 Initiative.

3 (e) EVALUATION; REPORT.—

4 (1) EVALUATION.—Not later than 3 years after
5 the date of enactment of this Act, the Secretary
6 shall conduct a comprehensive quantitative and qual-
7 itative evaluation of the projects carried out using
8 assistance provided under the Initiative, including—

9 (A) a description of—

10 (i) the types of projects carried out;

11 (ii) the communities in which the
12 projects are carried out;

13 (iii) the organizations and entities
14 participating in the projects; and

15 (iv) the types of partnerships devel-
16 oped to carry out the projects; and

17 (B) the economic and social impacts of the
18 investments in the projects.

19 (2) REPORT.—Not later than 4 years after the
20 date of enactment of this Act, the Secretary shall
21 submit to the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition,
22 and Forestry of the Senate and the Committee on
23 Agriculture of the House of Representatives a report
24 describing the evaluation conducted under paragraph

- 1 (1), including a thorough analysis of the outcomes of
- 2 the evaluation.

