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(Original Signature of Member)

119TH CONGRESS  
2D SESSION

**H. R.**

To require the Secretary of Agriculture to establish a web-based platform to enable recipients of Federal financial assistance administered by the Rural Utilities Service to track the status of their projects throughout the permitting and review process, and for other purposes.

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IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Mrs. MCCCLAIN DELANEY introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on \_\_\_\_\_

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**A BILL**

To require the Secretary of Agriculture to establish a web-based platform to enable recipients of Federal financial assistance administered by the Rural Utilities Service to track the status of their projects throughout the permitting and review process, 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 “Rural Utilities Service  
5 Modernization Act”.

1 **SEC. 2. ESTABLISHMENT OF WEB-BASED PLATFORM TO EN-**  
2 **ABLE RECIPIENTS OF FEDERAL FINANCIAL**  
3 **ASSISTANCE ADMINISTERED BY THE RURAL**  
4 **UTILITIES SERVICE TO TRACK THE STATUS**  
5 **OF THEIR PROJECTS THROUGHOUT THE PER-**  
6 **MITTING AND REVIEW PROCESS.**

7 (a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Agriculture,  
8 through the Rural Utilities Service, shall establish, oper-  
9 ate, and maintain a secure, web-based platform that is de-  
10 signed to improve predictability and accountability for re-  
11 cipients of Federal financial assistance administered by  
12 the Rural Utilities Service, by enabling the recipients to  
13 track the status of their projects throughout the permit-  
14 ting and review process (including environmental and  
15 interagency coordination).

16 (b) REQUIREMENTS.—In carrying out subsection (a),  
17 the Secretary shall—

18 (1) require the Rural Utilities Service to deter-  
19 mine, establish, and implement user access mecha-  
20 nisms enabling the recipients to view permitting and  
21 review status for their projects;

22 (2) require clear status indicators and esti-  
23 mated timelines for each phase of the permitting  
24 and review process for projects assisted by the Rural  
25 Utilities Service;

1           (3) ensure that, through the platform, docu-  
2           ments may be uploaded and downloaded and appli-  
3           cants may correspond with relevant Rural Utilities  
4           Service offices;

5           (4) ensure that automated notifications are pro-  
6           vided to recipients when a project advances to a new  
7           review stage or when additional information or ac-  
8           tion is required;

9           (5) direct the Rural Utilities Service to coordi-  
10          nate, as appropriate, with—

11           (A) other agencies of the Department of  
12          Agriculture;

13           (B) the Department of Commerce;

14           (C) the Department of Defense;

15           (D) the Department of Energy;

16           (E) the Department of the Interior;

17           (F) the Department of Transportation;

18           (G) the General Services Administration;

19           (H) the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers;

20          and

21           (I) any relevant Federal permitting au-  
22          thorities,

23          including environmental reviews conducted pursuant  
24          to the National Environmental Policy Act and the  
25          National Historic Preservation Act, while maintain-

1       ing the responsibility of the Rural Utilities Service  
2       for project status reporting.

3       (c) ANNUAL REPORTS.—Within 2 years after the  
4       date of the enactment of this Act, and annually thereafter,  
5       the Secretary of Agriculture shall submit to Congress a  
6       written report that describes the development, implemen-  
7       tation, use, and performance of the platform.

8       (d) LIMITATIONS ON AUTHORIZATION OF APPRO-  
9       PRIATIONS.—

10           (1) IN GENERAL.—To carry out this section,  
11       there are authorized to be appropriated to the Sec-  
12       retary of Agriculture a total of not more than  
13       \$30,000,000, of which—

14           (A) a total of not less than \$20,000,000  
15       and not more than \$24,000,000 may shall be  
16       available for fiscal years 2026 and 2027 for de-  
17       velopment of the platform; and

18           (B) a total of not less than \$6,000,000  
19       and not more than \$10,000,000 shall be avail-  
20       able for each of fiscal years 2028 through 2035  
21       for operation and maintenance of the platform.

22           (2) AVAILABILITY.—The amounts made avail-  
23       able by paragraph (1) are authorized to remain  
24       available until expended.

1 **SEC. 3. RURAL UTILITIES SERVICE PREPLANNING EDU-**  
2 **CATION AND PLANNING GRANTS.**

3 (a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Agriculture, act-  
4 ing through the Administrator of the Rural Utilities Serv-  
5 ice (in this section referred to as the Secretary), shall  
6 make grants to eligible entities for predevelopment plan-  
7 ning, permitting, and early-stage project preparation ac-  
8 tivities under any program administered by the Rural Util-  
9 ities Service.

10 (b) ELIGIBLE ENTITIES.—An entity is eligible for a  
11 grant under this section if the entity is qualified to partici-  
12 pate in a program administered by the Rural Utilities  
13 Service and is unable to finance predevelopment work by  
14 borrowing or other means.

15 (c) COST-SHARING.—The amount of each grant  
16 under this section shall be not more than 75 percent of  
17 the cost of the activities for which the grant is made.

18 (d) USE OF FUNDS.—The recipient of a grant under  
19 this section shall use the grant for pre-development activi-  
20 ties such as—

21 (1) feasibility studies, permitting, design assist-  
22 ance, and other pre-development planning activities;

23 (2) technical assistance and training to improve  
24 planning and readiness for a program administered  
25 by the Rural Utilities Service; or

1           (3) participation in a partnerships with a Fed-  
2           eral, State, Tribal, or local entity to support project  
3           preparation.

4           (e) PROHIBITION.—A grant under this section shall  
5           not be used to reimburse costs of work completed before  
6           the grant is made.

7           (f) ADMINISTRATIVE PROVISIONS.—

8           (1) GUIDELINES.—The Secretary shall issue  
9           guidelines relating to applications for grants under  
10          this section, selection of grantees, and administra-  
11          tion of the grants.

12          (2) LIMITATION ON ADMINISTRATIVE COSTS.—  
13          In administering this section, the Secretary shall  
14          limit administrative costs incurred pursuant to this  
15          section, to ensure that funds made available to carry  
16          out this section are used for predevelopment activi-  
17          ties to the maximum extent practicable.

18          (g) REPORTS.—The recipient of a grant under this  
19          section shall transmit annual reports to the Secretary on  
20          the activities funded with the grant and the outcomes of  
21          the activities.

22          (h) LIMITATIONS ON AUTHORIZATION OF APPRO-  
23          PRIATIONS.—To carry out this section, there are author-  
24          ized to be appropriated not more than \$15,000,000 for  
25          each of fiscal years 2026 through 2035.

1 **SEC. 4. NOTICE OF FUNDING OPPORTUNITY TIMELINES.**

2 (a) ISSUANCE OF REGULATIONS.—Within 6 months  
3 after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary  
4 of Agriculture, acting through Rural Development and the  
5 Administrator of the Rural Utilities Service, shall pre-  
6 scribe final regulations to improve timelines for notices of  
7 funding opportunity for grants administered by the Rural  
8 Utilities Service, that should provide for—

9 (1) a uniform notice of funding opportunity  
10 timeline applicable to all Rural Utilities Service  
11 grant programs;

12 (2) sector-specific notice of funding opportunity  
13 timelines for major program areas of the Rural Util-  
14 ities Service, including—

15 (A) electricity;

16 (B) telecommunications, including tele-  
17 phone and broadband;

18 (C) broadband distance learning and tele-  
19 medicine; and

20 (D) water and waste disposal; or

21 (3) if the approaches described in paragraphs  
22 (1) and (2) are not practicable, an alternative ap-  
23 proach to improving predictability and coordination  
24 of notice of funding opportunity timelines.

1 (b) IMPLEMENTATION.—The Secretary shall imple-  
2 ment the final regulations within 18 months after the date  
3 of the enactment of this Act.

4 **SEC. 5. ONLINE GRANT APPLICATIONS.**

5 Within 2 years after the date of the enactment of this  
6 Act, the Administrator of the Rural Utilities Service shall  
7 require all applications for a grant administered by the  
8 Rural Utilities Service to be submitted electronically  
9 through an online system or, if such an applicant is unable  
10 to so submit such an application, provide alternative  
11 means for the applicant to submit the application.

12 **SEC. 6. STAFF ASSESSMENT AND REPORT TO CONGRESS.**

13 (a) STAFF ASSESSMENT.—The Secretary of Agri-  
14 culture shall evaluate the processes used by the staff of  
15 the Rural Utilities Service to—

16 (1) review applications for assistance from pro-  
17 grams administered by the Rural Utilities Service;

18 (2) provide related technical assistance; and

19 (3) monitor assistance awardees,

20 with the goal of maximizing the efficiency and effective-  
21 ness of the programs.

22 (b) REPORT TO CONGRESS.—2 years after the date  
23 of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Agriculture  
24 and the Administrator of the Rural Utilities Service shall  
25 jointly prepare and submit to the Committee on Agri-

1 culture of the House of Representatives and the Com-  
2 mittee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry of the Sen-  
3 ate a report that—

4 (1) examines, at a minimum—

5 (A) the workload of the staff of the Rural  
6 Utilities Service, the allocation of the workload,  
7 and the efficiency of the staff in reviewing ap-  
8 plications and assisting applicants for assist-  
9 ance under the programs administered by the  
10 Rural Utilities Service; and

11 (B) the timeliness, consistency, and quality  
12 of technical assistance provided and award deci-  
13 sions made under the programs; and

14 (2) sets forth—

15 (A) recommendations to enhance the effec-  
16 tiveness of the online permitting platform estab-  
17 lished under section 2;

18 (B) an assessment of how permitting for  
19 projects assisted by the Rural Utilities Service  
20 could be expedited; and

21 (C) findings that could strengthen service  
22 delivery to rural communities.