

[DISCUSSION DRAFT]

115TH CONGRESS
2^D SESSION

H. R. _____

To provide funds to enable counties to make competitive grants to qualified local units of government to address major community development and public infrastructure challenges, and for other purposes.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Mr. WALZ introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on _____

A BILL

To provide funds to enable counties to make competitive grants to qualified local units of government to address major community development and public infrastructure challenges, 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 “Small Town and Re-
5 gional Vitality Investment Act”.

1 **SEC. 2. GRANTS FOR COUNTIES.**

2 (a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Agriculture,
3 through the Rural Development Innovation Center, shall
4 make a block grant in accordance with this Act to a county
5 with a submission approved by the Secretary under section
6 3, for each year in the 5-year period during which the plan
7 included in the submission is to be in effect.

8 (b) DEFINITIONS.—In this Act:

9 (1) QUALIFIED LOCAL UNIT OF GOVERN-
10 MENT.—The term “qualified local unit of govern-
11 ment” means a town, city, village, township, or simi-
12 lar entity that has a population of no greater than
13 30,000 individuals.

14 (2) REGIONAL PLANNING ENTITY.—The term
15 “regional planning entity” means a regional plan-
16 ning commission, regional council, or council of gov-
17 ernments.

18 (3) SECRETARY.—The term “Secretary” means
19 the Secretary of Agriculture.

20 **SEC. 3. SUBMISSION; CONSOLIDATED PLAN.**

21 (a) SUBMISSION.—A county that desires grants
22 under this Act shall submit to the Secretary a consolidated
23 plan that—

24 (1) provides a broad overview of the projects for
25 which the grants are to be used;

1 (2) identifies ways to engage residents of the
2 county (including by holding public hearings, pub-
3 lishing information on available funds, or providing
4 technical assistance for persons interested in apply-
5 ing for grant funds) throughout the process of ap-
6 plying for, and using grants provided under this Act;

7 (3) identifies specific areas in need of improve-
8 ment in the county;

9 (4) describes the short- and long-term commu-
10 nity and economic development objectives of the
11 county;

12 (5) identifies the private, public, and nonprofit
13 institutions that are willing and able to assist in car-
14 rying out the plan;

15 (6) has been developed in coordination with the
16 regional planning entity for the area in which the
17 county is located (or, if there is no such entity for
18 the area, the Secretary), and using the Comprehen-
19 sive Economic Development Strategy developed by
20 the Economic Development Administration in coordi-
21 nation with the regional planning entity (or, if there
22 is no such entity, the Secretary);

23 (7) specifies the 5-year period during which the
24 plan is to be in effect;

1 (8) is submitted to the Secretary and the office
2 of economic development of the State in which the
3 county is located, not later than 45 days before the
4 beginning of the 5-year period referred to in para-
5 graph (7); and

6 (9) includes—

7 (A) a binding commitment from the State
8 in which the county is located to provide the
9 county with \$10 (from funds not provided by
10 the Federal Government) to carry out the plan
11 for each \$85 in funds provided to the county
12 under this Act to carry out the plan; and

13 (B) a binding commitment from the county
14 that the county will, alone or in combination
15 with 1 or more local units of government in the
16 county, expend a total of \$5 (from funds not
17 provided by the Federal Government) for each
18 \$85 in funds provided to the county under this
19 Act to carry out the plan.

20 (b) APPROVAL; DISAPPROVAL.—

21 (1) APPROVAL.—The Secretary shall approve a
22 submission that meets the requirements of sub-
23 section (a) if—

24 (A) not less than 80 percent of the grants
25 to be provided to the submitter under this Act

1 would be distributed to 1 or more qualified local
2 units of government through a competitive
3 grant program, and the submitter would retain
4 not more than 20 percent of the grants;

5 (B) the grants would be used, in accord-
6 ance with the consolidated plan contained in the
7 submission, to purchase, construct, improve, or
8 operate essential community facilities (including
9 health care facilities; public facilities, such as
10 town halls, courthouses, airport hangers, or
11 public transportation; community support serv-
12 ices, such as workforce housing, child care cen-
13 ters, community centers, or transitional hous-
14 ing; public safety services; educational services,
15 including classroom technological moderniza-
16 tion; utility services, including environmental
17 protection services such as sewage disposal,
18 sanitation, and pollution abatement; local food
19 systems; and local amenities), purchase equip-
20 ment, and pay related project expenses, con-
21 sistent with section 5; and

22 (C) the submitter demonstrates that there
23 is substantial community support for the plan.

24 (2) DISAPPROVAL.—The Secretary shall make
25 available to the general public the reasons for the

1 disapproval of a submission made pursuant to this
2 section.

3 **SEC. 4. ALLOCATION OF FUNDS.**

4 (a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall allocate the
5 amounts made available by this Act among counties with
6 submissions approved under section 3, in accordance a for-
7 mula prescribed by the Secretary in regulations, that the
8 Secretary determines would best allow counties to address
9 major community development and public infrastructure
10 challenges. In developing the formula, the Secretary shall
11 consider the following criteria:

12 (1) Per capita income levels.

13 (2) Population growth rates.

14 (b) EVALUATION.—Every 2 years, the Secretary shall
15 evaluate the effectiveness of the formula prescribed under
16 subsection (a), and revise the formula, as necessary, to
17 best enable counties to address major community develop-
18 ment and public infrastructure challenges.

19 (c) REPORT TO CONGRESS.—The Secretary shall
20 submit to the Congress a report on each formula used
21 under this section, which sets forth the formula and ex-
22 plains how allocating the amounts made available by this
23 Act best achieves the purposes of this Act.

1 **SEC. 5. LIMITATIONS; USE OF FUNDS.**

2 (a) LIMITATIONS.—A local unit of government to
3 which a grant is made under this Act may not use the
4 grant—

5 (1) to discriminate against any person on the
6 basis of race, color, sex, age, sexual orientation, or
7 national origin;

8 (2) as matching funds to receive Federal funds
9 under any other law; or

10 (3) in contravention of the requirements under
11 sections 3141 through 3144, 3146, and 3147 of title
12 40, United States Code.

13 (b) USE OF FUNDS.—A county to which funds are
14 provided under this Act for a fiscal year shall reserve 1
15 percent of the funds for administration of the funds.

16 **SEC. 6. ANNUAL ACTION REPORTS; AUDITS BY THE INSPEC-**
17 **TOR GENERAL.**

18 (a) ANNUAL ACTION REPORTS.—By the end of each
19 year for which a grant is made under this Act to a county,
20 the county shall submit to the Secretary a report that—

21 (1) identifies the development goals of the coun-
22 ty for the succeeding year;

23 (2) contains a brief summary of the actions and
24 activities to be undertaken with funds provided
25 under this Act, and identifies specific, measurable

1 goals that match the priorities identified in the plan
2 to be carried out using the funds;

3 (3) outlines the Federal and non-federal re-
4 sources that will be used in doing so;

5 (4) details the progress made by the county in
6 achieving the goals identified as described in this
7 subsection for the preceding year; and

8 (5) includes information on the amount of the
9 grant provided to the county for the year covered by
10 the report, and details on how the money was dis-
11 tributed for each project under the plan referred to
12 in section 3.

13 (b) AUDITS BY THE INSPECTOR GENERAL.—The In-
14 spector General of the Department of Agriculture shall
15 conduct periodic and random audits of the projects to
16 which funds are provided under this Act.

17 **SEC. 7. APPROPRIATION.**

18 Out of any money in the Treasury of the United
19 States not otherwise appropriated, there are appropriated
20 \$10,000,000,000 for fiscal year 2019 and each succeeding
21 fiscal year for grants under this Act.