

117TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

S. 3506

To strengthen the public health workforce loan repayment program, and
for other purposes.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

JANUARY 13 (legislative day, JANUARY 10), 2022

Ms. SMITH (for herself, Ms. COLLINS, Mr. BOOKER, and Ms. MURKOWSKI)
introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the
Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions

A BILL

To strengthen the public health workforce loan repayment
program, 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 “Strengthening the
5 Public Health Workforce Act”.

6 **SEC. 2. PUBLIC HEALTH WORKFORCE LOAN REPAYMENT**
7 **PROGRAM.**

8 Section 776 of the Public Health Service Act (42
9 U.S.C. 295f–1) is amended—

10 (1) in subsection (a)—

1 (A) by striking “supply of” and inserting
2 “supply of, and encourage recruitment and re-
3 tention of,”; and

4 (B) by striking “Federal,”;
5 (2) in subsection (b)—

6 (A) by amending paragraph (1)(A) to read
7 as follows:

8 “(1)(A)(i) be accepted for enrollment, or be en-
9 rolled, as a student in an accredited institution of
10 higher education or school of public health in the
11 final semester (or equivalent) of a program leading
12 to a certificate or degree, including a master’s or
13 doctoral degree, in public health, epidemiology, lab-
14 oratory sciences, data systems, data science, data
15 analytics, informatics, statistics, or other subject
16 matter related to public health; and

17 “(ii) be employed by or have accepted employ-
18 ment with a State, local, or Tribal public health
19 agency, or a related training fellowship at such
20 State, local, or Tribal public health agency, as recog-
21 nized by the Secretary, to commence upon gradua-
22 tion; or”; and

23 (B) in paragraph (1)(B)—

24 (i) in clause (i)—

1 (I) by striking “accredited edu-
 2 cational institution in a State or terri-
 3 tory” and inserting “accredited insti-
 4 tution of higher education or school of
 5 public health”; and

6 (II) by striking “a public health
 7 or health professions degree or certifi-
 8 cate” and inserting “a certificate or
 9 degree, including a master’s or doc-
 10 toral degree, in public health, epidemi-
 11 ology, laboratory sciences, data sys-
 12 tems, data science, data analytics,
 13 informatics, statistics, or other subject
 14 matter related to public health”; and
 15 (ii) in clause (ii)—

16 (I) by striking “Federal,”; and

17 (II) by striking “fellowship,” and
 18 inserting “fellowship at such State,
 19 local, or Tribal public health agency,”;

20 (3) in subsection (c)(2)—

21 (A) by striking “Federal,”; and

22 (B) by striking “equal to the greater of—
 23 ” and all that follows through the end of sub-
 24 paragraph (B) and inserting “of at least 2 con-
 25 secutive years;”;

1 (4) in subsection (d)—

2 (A) by amending paragraph (1) to read as
3 follows:

4 “(1) IN GENERAL.—A loan repayment provided
5 for an individual under a written contract under the
6 Program shall consist of payment, in accordance
7 with paragraph (2), for the individual toward the
8 outstanding principal and interest on education
9 loans incurred by the individual in the pursuit of the
10 relevant degree or certificate described in subsection
11 (b)(1) in accordance with the terms of the con-
12 tract.”; and

13 (B) in paragraph (2)—

14 (i) by striking “For each year” and
15 inserting the following:

16 “(A) IN GENERAL.—For each year”;

17 (ii) by striking “\$35,000” and insert-
18 ing “\$50,000”;

19 (iii) by striking “\$105,000” and in-
20 serting “\$150,000”; and

21 (iv) by adding at the end the fol-
22 lowing:

23 “(B) CONSIDERATIONS.—The Secretary
24 may take action in making awards under this
25 section to ensure that—

1 “(i) an appropriate proportion of con-
 2 tracts are awarded to individuals who are
 3 eligible to participate in the Program pur-
 4 suant to subsection (b)(1)(A); and

5 “(ii) contracts awarded under this
 6 section are equitably distributed among—

7 “(I) the geographical regions of
 8 the United States;

9 “(II) local, State, and Tribal
 10 public health departments; and

11 “(III) such public health depart-
 12 ments under subclause (II) serving
 13 rural and urban areas.”;

14 (5) in subsection (e), by striking “receiving a
 15 degree or certificate from a health professions or
 16 other related school” and inserting “with a contract
 17 to serve under subsection (c)”;

18 (6) in subsection (f), by adding at the end the
 19 following: “In the event that a participant fails to ei-
 20 ther begin or complete the obligated service require-
 21 ment of the loan repayment contract under this sec-
 22 tion, the Secretary may waive or suspend either the
 23 unfulfilled service or the assessed damages as pro-
 24 vided for under section 338E(d), as appropriate.”;

1 (7) by redesignating subsection (g) as sub-
2 section (h);

3 (8) by inserting after subsection (f) the fol-
4 lowing:

5 “(g) ELIGIBLE LOANS.—The loans eligible for repay-
6 ment under this section are each of the following:

7 “(1) Any loan for education or training for em-
8 ployment by a health department.

9 “(2) Any loan under part E of title VIII (relat-
10 ing to nursing student loans).

11 “(3) Any Federal Direct Stafford Loan, Fed-
12 eral Direct PLUS Loan, Federal Direct Unsub-
13 sidized Stafford Loan, or Federal Direct Consolida-
14 tion Loan (as such terms are used in section 455 of
15 the Higher Education Act of 1965).

16 “(4) Any Federal Perkins Loan under part E
17 of title I of the Higher Education Act of 1965.

18 “(5) Any other Federal loan, as the Secretary
19 determines appropriate.”;

20 (9) in subsection (h), as so redesignated, by
21 striking “\$195,000,000 for fiscal year 2010, and
22 such sums as may be necessary for each of fiscal
23 years 2011 through 2015” and inserting “such sums
24 as may be necessary for each of fiscal years 2023
25 through 2025”; and

1 (10) by striking “tribal” each place such term
2 appears and inserting “Tribal”.

3 **SEC. 3. GAO STUDY ON PUBLIC HEALTH WORKFORCE.**

4 (a) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 2 years after the
5 date of enactment of this Act, the Comptroller General
6 of the United States shall—

7 (1) conduct an evaluation of what is known
8 about the public health workforce in the United
9 States during the COVID–19 pandemic, which shall
10 address—

11 (A) existing gaps in the Federal, State,
12 local, Tribal, and territorial public health work-
13 force, including positions that may be required
14 to prevent, prepare for, and respond to, a public
15 health emergency such as COVID–19;

16 (B) challenges associated with the hiring,
17 recruitment, and retention of the Federal,
18 State, local, Tribal, and territorial public health
19 workforce; and

20 (C) recommended steps to improve hiring,
21 recruitment, and retention of the public health
22 workforce; and

23 (2) submit to the Committee on Health, Edu-
24 cation, Labor, and Pensions of the Senate and the

- 1 Committee on Energy and Commerce of the House
- 2 of Representatives a report on such review.

