

118TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

S. 3453

To establish a grant program to facilitate peer-to-peer mental health support programs for secondary school students, and for other purposes.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

DECEMBER 7, 2023

Mr. HICKENLOOPER (for himself 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 establish a grant program to facilitate peer-to-peer mental health support programs for secondary school students, 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 “Peer-to-Peer Mental
5 Health Support Act”.

6 **SEC. 2. PEER-TO-PEER MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT GRANT**
7 **PROGRAM.**

8 (a) DEFINITIONS.—In this Act:

1 (1) ASSISTANT SECRETARY.—The term “Assist-
 2 ant Secretary” means the Assistant Secretary for
 3 Mental Health and Substance Use.

4 (2) ESEA TERMS.—The terms “evidence-
 5 based”, “local educational agency”, and “secondary
 6 school” have the meanings given those terms in sec-
 7 tion 8101 of the Elementary and Secondary Edu-
 8 cation Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 7801).

9 (3) ELIGIBLE ENTITY.—The term “eligible enti-
 10 ty” means—

11 (A) a local educational agency;

12 (B) an Indian Tribe or a Tribal organiza-
 13 tion (as such terms are defined in section 4 of
 14 the Indian Self-Determination and Education
 15 Assistance Act (25 U.S.C. 5304)) or a Tribal
 16 educational agency; and

17 (C) the Bureau of Indian Education.

18 (4) PEER-TO-PEER MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT
 19 PROGRAM.—The term “peer-to-peer mental health
 20 support program” means an evidence-based inter-
 21 vention that trains students to become peer support
 22 specialists and provide mental health support to
 23 other students.

24 (5) SCHOOL-BASED MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES
 25 PROVIDER.—The term “school-based mental health

1 services provider” has the meaning given the term in
2 section 4102 of the Elementary and Secondary Edu-
3 cation Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 7112).

4 (b) GRANT PROGRAM.—

5 (1) IN GENERAL.—Beginning not later than 1
6 year after the date of the enactment of this Act, the
7 Assistant Secretary, in consultation with the Sec-
8 retary of Education, as part of the Project AWARE
9 (Advancing Wellness and Resiliency in Education)
10 program of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health
11 Services Administration, or a similar program, shall
12 award grants, on a competitive basis, to eligible enti-
13 ties to carry out evidence-based peer-to-peer mental
14 health support programs for students enrolled in
15 secondary schools.

16 (2) SUFFICIENT SIZE AND SCOPE.—Grants
17 awarded under this section shall be of sufficient size
18 and scope to allow recipients to carry out the activi-
19 ties described in this section.

20 (3) DURATION.—A grant awarded under this
21 section shall be for a period of not more than 5
22 years.

23 (c) APPLICATIONS.—To be eligible to receive a grant
24 under this section, an eligible entity shall submit an appli-
25 cation to the Assistant Secretary at such time, in such

1 manner, and containing such information as the Assistant
2 Secretary may reasonably require.

3 (d) USE OF AMOUNTS.—

4 (1) IN GENERAL.—An eligible entity shall use
5 grant amounts provided under this section only to—

6 (A) implement new or operate existing evi-
7 dence-based peer-to-peer mental health support
8 programs that meet the requirements of para-
9 graph (2) in 1 or more secondary schools served
10 by the eligible entity; or

11 (B) provide training to students, adult su-
12 pervisors, and school-based mental health serv-
13 ices providers in implementing the evidence-
14 based peer-to-peer mental health support pro-
15 grams that meet the requirements of paragraph
16 (2).

17 (2) PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS.—Each peer-to-
18 peer mental health support program funded by a
19 grant under this section shall include, at a min-
20 imum, the following components:

21 (A) TRAINING.—Peer support specialists
22 and participating school staff overseeing the
23 peer-to-peer mental health support program
24 shall receive training in—

25 (i) empathic listening;

1 (ii) enhancing protective mental
2 health factors;

3 (iii) recognizing and appropriately re-
4 sponding to risk factors and warning signs
5 of mental health challenges, including sui-
6 cidal ideation and depression;

7 (iv) connecting students with profes-
8 sional mental health services and recovery
9 supports, as necessary;

10 (v) recognizing and appropriately re-
11 sponding to risk factors and warning signs
12 associated with mental health and sub-
13 stance use challenges, including co-occur-
14 ring challenges; and

15 (vi) other areas included in the Na-
16 tional Model Standards for Peer Support
17 Certification of the Substance Abuse and
18 Mental Health Services Administration.

19 (B) PROGRAM OVERSIGHT.—Each peer-to-
20 peer mental health support program shall—

21 (i) be overseen by a trained and cer-
22 tified youth peer support supervisor; and

23 (ii) receive guidance from a school-
24 based mental health services provider.

1 (C) FERPA.—Any education record of a
 2 student collected or maintained under sub-
 3 section (d) shall have the protections required
 4 for education records under section 444 of the
 5 General Education Provisions Act (20 U.S.C.
 6 1232g).

7 (e) RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER FEDERAL PRO-
 8 GRAMS.—An eligible entity that receives a grant under
 9 this section may combine such grant funds with other
 10 Federal funds to support the activities carried out under
 11 this section.

12 (f) PRIORITY; AMOUNTS.—

13 (1) PRIORITY.—In awarding grants under this
 14 section, the Assistant Secretary shall give priority to
 15 applications submitted by eligible entities that—

16 (A) propose to use grant amounts to estab-
 17 lish new peer-to-peer mental health support
 18 programs in a majority of secondary schools
 19 served by such eligible entity;

20 (B) propose to use grant amounts to estab-
 21 lish a new peer-to-peer mental health support
 22 program in 1 or more secondary schools without
 23 such programs;

1 (C) propose to use grant amounts for peer-
 2 to-peer mental health support programs that
 3 have a suicide prevention component; or

4 (D) are located in areas that have high
 5 rates of suicide or have experienced recent trau-
 6 matic events.

7 (2) GRANT AMOUNTS.—A grant awarded to an
 8 eligible entity under the Program may not exceed
 9 \$250,000.

10 (g) EVALUATION; REPORT.—

11 (1) EVALUATION.—The Assistant Secretary
 12 shall carry out an evaluation to measure the efficacy
 13 of the program under this section. The evaluation
 14 shall measure—

15 (A) student participation in the peer-to-
 16 peer mental health support program and in-
 17 clude a demographic analysis;

18 (B) the efficacy of the training provided to
 19 peer support specialists and school staff in in-
 20 creasing their knowledge of protective factors,
 21 risk factors, and warning signs of mental health
 22 challenges; and

23 (C) the percentage of students partici-
 24 pating in the peer-to-peer mental health support
 25 program who report improved mental health

1 outcomes or are connected to professional men-
2 tal health services.

3 (2) REPORT.—The Assistant Secretary shall
4 prepare and submit a report to the Committee on
5 Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions of the Sen-
6 ate and the Committee on Energy and Commerce
7 and the Committee on Education and the Workforce
8 of the House of Representatives containing the re-
9 sults of the evaluation conducted under paragraph
10 (1).

11 (h) TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE.—The Assistant Sec-
12 retary, in coordination with the Secretary of Education,
13 shall provide technical assistance to eligible entities apply-
14 ing for and receiving grants under this section, which shall
15 include the development and dissemination of best prac-
16 tices for evidence-based peer-to-peer mental health sup-
17 port programs.

18 (i) RULE OF CONSTRUCTION.—Section 4001 of the
19 Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (20
20 U.S.C. 7101) (not including the exception under sub-
21 section (a)(2)(B)(i) of such section) shall apply to an enti-
22 ty receiving a grant under this section in the same manner
23 as such section applies to an entity receiving funding
24 under title IV of such Act.

25 (j) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—

1 (1) IN GENERAL.—There are authorized to be
2 appropriated to carry out this section \$20,000,000
3 for each of fiscal years from 2024 through 2028.

4 (2) RESERVATIONS.—From the total amount
5 appropriated under paragraph (1) for a fiscal year,
6 the Assistant Secretary shall reserve—

7 (A) not more than 2 percent for awards to
8 eligible entities described in subsection
9 (a)(3)(C);

10 (B) not less than 2 percent for technical
11 assistance and administration; and

12 (C) not more than 2 percent for evalua-
13 tion, in accordance with subsection (g).

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