

117TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

S. 1181

To authorize the establishment of HOPE Account Pilot Projects, HOPE Action Plans Pilot Projects, and competitive grants for pilot projects.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

APRIL 15, 2021

Mrs. GILLIBRAND introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions

A BILL

To authorize the establishment of HOPE Account Pilot Projects, HOPE Action Plans Pilot Projects, and competitive grants for pilot projects.

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 “Health, Opportunity,
5 and Personal Empowerment Act of 2021” or the “HOPE
6 Act of 2021”.

7 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS.**

8 Congress finds the following:

9 (1) In 2018, according to the Department of
10 Agriculture, 37,200,000 individuals in the United

1 States (including 11,100,000 children) lived in food
2 insecure households. That equals 1 in 9 individuals
3 and 1 in 7 children.

4 (2) In 2020, during the COVID–19 pandemic,
5 food insecurity in the United States soared, with the
6 Census Household Pulse Survey finding that at least
7 22 percent of Americans, and 28 percent of children
8 in the United States, suffered from food insecurity
9 in the height of the pandemic.

10 (3) In 2018, according to the Bureau of the
11 Census, 34,000,000 individuals (including
12 10,500,000 children) lived below the Federal poverty
13 line. The majority of these individuals living in pov-
14 erty were working people, children, older individuals,
15 and individuals with disabilities.

16 (4) Many low-income individuals work multiple
17 jobs and, contrary to common misconceptions, if un-
18 employed, they spend a great deal of time looking
19 for work. They often travel by public transportation,
20 laboriously making multiple connections to shuttle
21 between home, work, social service agencies, houses
22 of worship, and grocery stores. For those living in
23 rural and suburban areas far from work and without
24 adequate public transportation they rely upon vehi-
25 cles to get to work, but these are often less reliable

1 secondhand vehicles, that often break down. From
2 traveling greater distances between available jobs
3 and livable areas with affordable housing options,
4 seeking out scarce childcare options that fit a tight
5 budget and a constrained travel schedule, and caring
6 for elderly parents or grandparents because a senior
7 living facility is not financially realistic, low-income
8 individuals have little spare time.

9 (5) While government safety net programs help
10 tens of millions of individuals avoid starvation,
11 homelessness, and other outcomes even more dread-
12 ful than everyday poverty, there are significant ob-
13 stacles that those seeking and maintaining govern-
14 ment assistance face for as long as they are eligible.
15 Qualified applicants are often required to travel sig-
16 nificant distances to multiple government offices,
17 preparing and submitting piles of nearly identical
18 paperwork to access the different government assist-
19 ance programs. Even when the application process
20 begins online, the eligible applicant is typically still
21 required to physically follow up with each govern-
22 ment office with physical copies, for near identical
23 meetings. As a result, many low-income people are
24 actually unaware of all the government benefits for
25 which they are eligible, reducing the amount of help

1 going to individuals in need by tens of billions of
2 dollars every year. The lines in these offices can
3 seem endless, and sometimes clients need to wait
4 outside, for hours, in the worst kinds of weather.
5 Many offices don't have weekend or night hours, so
6 an applicant is at risk of losing wages when often
7 their only option is to apply for government help
8 during work hours.

9 (6) Each year, many vital government programs
10 go underutilized because eligible beneficiaries are
11 hindered by obtrusive, time consuming, and repet-
12 itive application barriers. In 2017, according to the
13 Department of Agriculture, 16 percent of all people
14 eligible for supplemental nutrition assistance pro-
15 gram (SNAP), 53 percent of the "working poor" eli-
16 gible for SNAP, and 52 percent of adults over 60
17 who were eligible failed to receive it.

18 (7) The United States has hundreds of thou-
19 sands of nonprofit groups providing high quality and
20 much needed social services, but it is nearly impos-
21 sible for struggling people to determine which of
22 those organizations provides services they need,
23 whether the organization is conveniently located, and
24 for which services they are eligible. If they do deter-
25 mine that a nonprofit (or multiple nonprofits) could

1 help, they need to take yet more time to visit each
2 one.

3 (8) Since many government and nonprofit pro-
4 grams require frequent reapplications and recertifi-
5 cations, a low-income person often has to repeat the
6 same endless and frustrating process.

7 (9) Technology has fundamentally revamped the
8 lives of most individuals, usually for the better. Ac-
9 cording to the Pew Research Center, 71 percent of
10 low-income individuals have a smart phone as of
11 2019 (not because a smart phone is a luxury but be-
12 cause it is an essential tool of learning and work in
13 modern America) but they rarely can use these de-
14 vices to apply for benefits. Digital technology, com-
15 bined with policy improvements, can simplify the
16 lives and boost the long-term self-sufficiency of our
17 lowest income residents.

18 **SEC. 3. DEFINITIONS.**

19 In this Act:

20 (1) SECRETARIES.—The term “Secretaries”
21 means the Secretary of Health and Human Services,
22 the Secretary of Agriculture, and the Secretary of
23 Housing and Urban Development, acting collabo-
24 ratively.

1 (2) ELIGIBLE ENTITY.—The term “eligible pilot
2 community” means a State, unit of general purpose
3 local government, Tribal government, or an entity
4 that represents a smaller geographical area therein
5 (including a neighborhood).

6 (3) TARGET POPULATION.—The term “target
7 population” includes an individual or household
8 that—

9 (A) earns an income below 200 percent of
10 the Federal poverty line;

11 (B) suffers from food insecurity;

12 (C) earns insufficient income to ensure
13 food security or economic security;

14 (D) lives in a rural, suburban, or urban
15 community that suffers from poverty, hunger,
16 or food insecurity;

17 (E) is homeless;

18 (F) receives (or recently received) assist-
19 ance under a State program funded under part
20 A of title IV of the Social Security Act (42
21 U.S.C. 601 et seq.), relating to temporary as-
22 sistance to needy families;

23 (G) is eligible for benefits under any Fed-
24 eral nutrition assistance program or Federal
25 antipoverty program; or

1 (H) is formerly a youth in transition from
 2 foster care or the juvenile detention facilities.

3 (4) PARTNER NONPROFIT ORGANIZATION.—The
 4 term “partner nonprofit organization” means any
 5 national, regional, State, or local nonprofit group de-
 6 scribed in section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue
 7 Code of 1986 and exempt from tax under section
 8 501(a) of such Code.

9 **SEC. 4. HOPE ACCOUNTS PILOT PROJECTS.**

10 (a) PILOT PROJECTS AUTHORIZED.—The Secretaries
 11 shall allow eligible entities that apply to such Secretaries
 12 to carry out Health, Opportunity, and Personal Empower-
 13 ment (“HOPE”) Accounts Pilot Projects to enable target
 14 populations of individuals to establish through banks,
 15 credit unions, and any governmental or Tribal agencies
 16 HOPE accounts that enable such individuals—

17 (1) to have their paychecks deposited directly in
 18 such accounts;

19 (2) to use such accounts to increase savings
 20 that would be matched with funds provided by gov-
 21 ernment and private sources, including individual de-
 22 velopment accounts;

23 (3) to use an account mobile application on a
 24 smart phone to easily locate and sign up for job
 25 training and placement services online;

1 (4) to enable such individuals to use any smart
2 phone, tablet, or computer—

3 (A) to learn about the public and philan-
4 thropic programs that provide benefits to such
5 individuals, including aid to improve health, nu-
6 trition, job training and placement, housing,
7 and income;

8 (B) to receive Federal and State tax cred-
9 its; and

10 (C) to apply for, submit eligibility docu-
11 ments for, enroll in, and manage the use of
12 such benefits at once through the convenience
13 of their device if individuals or their households
14 are eligible for one or more of such benefits;

15 (5) to receive a basic smart phone, tablet, or
16 computer, along with a subsidized internet Wi-Fi ac-
17 cess plan, if such individuals do not own a smart
18 phone, tablet, or computer;

19 (6) to obtain the access and information de-
20 scribed in paragraph (4) with assistance at libraries,
21 government offices, or nonprofit agencies if such in-
22 dividuals are uncomfortable using internet tech-
23 nology themselves;

24 (7) to obtain access to the information de-
25 scribed in paragraph (4), with the assistance of gov-

1 ernment or nonprofit employees, AmeriCorps na-
2 tional service participants, or Senior Corps members,
3 to receive home visits if such individuals are elderly
4 or disabled;

5 (8) to access health care information that speci-
6 fies medical benefits, and any out-of-pocket costs,
7 for each of the health plans for which such individ-
8 uals may be eligible, and to empower such individ-
9 uals to easily select the plan that works best for
10 them;

11 (9) to enable such individuals to file directly
12 (and without expending funds to obtain third-party
13 tax filing services) to obtain Federal tax credits and
14 refunds, and in States and localities with their own
15 supplemental tax credits, to simultaneously file for
16 credits and refunds;

17 (10) to deposit cash in the account that is set
18 aside for education, job training, starting a business,
19 or buying a home and that would be nontaxable;

20 (11) to easily access and monitor, in 1 central
21 online account—

22 (A) to be able to check the status,
23 amounts, and recertification deadlines for some
24 or all their benefits and savings; and

1 (B) to pay all bills online, saving high
2 check cashing fees and enormous amounts of
3 time;

4 (12) to budget resources by using real-time
5 cash flow data and long-term financial planning
6 data, including calculating how much such individ-
7 uals would lose in interest on credit cards versus
8 how much such individuals would gain in interest by
9 saving more;

10 (13) to access calendar and scheduling func-
11 tions that enable individuals to keep track of all job
12 search, work, family, and school obligations, as well
13 as any social service filing or appointment dates;

14 (14) to be protected by security and privacy
15 systems so that only such individuals, and not the
16 government, nonprofit, or banking partners, would
17 be able to see or track private financial and appoint-
18 ment information; and

19 (15) notwithstanding other provisions of law, to
20 allow program applicants to easily and clearly au-
21 thorize their sharing of personal and financial infor-
22 mation with multiple government agencies, solely for
23 the purpose of those government agencies enabling
24 the individuals to apply for and utilize government
25 benefits.

1 (b) FISCAL YEARS.—Pilot projects authorized by
2 subsection (a) shall be carried out for a 1-year period in
3 each of the fiscal years 2021 through 2026.

4 **SEC. 5. HOPE ACTION PLANS PILOT PROJECTS.**

5 (a) PILOT PROJECTS AUTHORIZED.—The Secretaries
6 shall allow eligible entities that apply to such Secretaries
7 to carry out HOPE Action Plans Pilot Projects to enable
8 target populations of individuals to partner with govern-
9 ment and nonprofit organizations by entering into vol-
10 untary agreements to carry out long-term HOPE action
11 plans that—

12 (1) specify exactly how the parties to such plans
13 will help such individuals and their families earn,
14 learn, and save better in order to ensure greater eco-
15 nomic opportunity for themselves and their children
16 by working together in a long-term, positive relation-
17 ship for the purpose of ensuring upward mobility;

18 (2) are designed to empower such individuals
19 and their families to better organize their time and
20 focus their activities on productive endeavors while
21 providing them extra resources to do so;

22 (3) may be—

23 (A) short-term, conducted over a year or 2
24 years, and aimed at helping families achieve

1 very basic goals, such as avoiding homelessness
2 and hunger; or

3 (B) long-term with far more ambitious
4 goals for upward mobility; and

5 (4) would require that participating individuals
6 and families, government entities, and nonprofit
7 partners have equal rights to hold each other ac-
8 countable for plan outcomes and funding.

9 (b) FISCAL YEARS.—Pilot projects authorized by
10 subsection (a) shall be carried out in each of the fiscal
11 years 2021 through 2026.

12 **SEC. 6. COMPETITIVE GRANTS FOR PILOT PROJECTS.**

13 (a) APPLICATION FOR GRANT.—The Secretaries shall
14 each create grant application processes to competitively
15 make grants to eligible entities to aid target populations.
16 To be eligible to receive a grant for a fiscal year under
17 this section, eligible entities shall submit to the appro-
18 priate Secretary an application that contains a description
19 of how the applicant proposes to use the grant funds to
20 implement the components of the pilot projects authorized
21 by this section. Applications shall be submitted in such
22 form, at such time, and containing such other information
23 as the Secretaries may require.

24 (b) FORM OF GRANTS.—If a Secretary finds it appro-
25 priate, the Secretary may use cooperative agreements, as

1 described in section 6305 of title 31, United States Code,
2 for purposes of making grants under this section.

3 (c) AMOUNT OF GRANT.—Grants made under this
4 section shall range in amounts from \$250,000 to
5 \$3,000,000, and should be proportionate to the geo-
6 graphical size, project complexity, and number of individ-
7 uals participating in each project. Eligible entities may re-
8 ceive grants made under this section by two or more of
9 the Secretaries. To the extent funds are available, each
10 Secretary shall make not fewer than 8 such grants annu-
11 ally.

12 (d) DISTRIBUTION OF GRANTS.—To the extent prac-
13 ticable, the Secretaries shall make grants for pilot projects
14 that operate statewide, as well as pilot projects designed
15 to serve specific rural, urban, and suburban areas. To the
16 extent practicable, pilot projects for which grants are
17 made shall be distributed among diverse administrative re-
18 gions of Department of Housing and Urban Development,
19 the Department of Health and Human Services, and the
20 Department of Agriculture.

21 (e) PREFERENCE.—For purposes of making grants
22 under this section, preference shall be given for pilot
23 projects that—

24 (1) serve individuals in historically underserved,
25 high-poverty, rural or urban communities;

1 (2) simultaneously test both HOPE Accounts
2 and HOPE Action Plans;

3 (3) involve low-income individuals as equal part-
4 ners in project planning and implementation;

5 (4) make additional funds available directly to
6 low-income households through action plans, either
7 through government payments or through nonprofit
8 subgrantees;

9 (5) are matched by considerable non-Federal
10 funds without penalizing very-low income, under-
11 served rural and urban communities that cannot
12 provide non-Federal matching funds;

13 (6) propose concrete plans for long-term sus-
14 tainability and expansions without future Federal
15 grant funds;

16 (7) assist low-income households to apply for
17 the Federal earned income tax credits and State tax
18 credits;

19 (8) provide resources in both English and addi-
20 tional languages commonly spoken in the applicable
21 area;

22 (9) prioritize client-facing, fully tested tech-
23 nology and mobile device applications;

24 (10) include a robust monitoring and evaluation
25 planning and reporting plan, including proposed

1 staffing and reporting for that plan, including re-
2 porting on the extent to which the pilot makes it
3 easier, quicker, and less costly for low-income indi-
4 viduals to access a variety of benefits, the extent to
5 which the pilot will save administrative funds over
6 the long-run, the extent to which the accuracy and
7 integrity of the benefits programs included are main-
8 tained or improved, and the extent to which low-in-
9 come households are able to more easily obtain free
10 or low-cost banking services;

11 (11) subcontract part of the pilot project imple-
12 mentation work to United States-based private busi-
13 nesses, banks, savings and loans, credit unions, co-
14 ops and nonprofit organizations described in section
15 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986
16 with relevant, successful experience in similar or re-
17 lated project activities;

18 (12) incorporate a benefits calculator to enable
19 applicants to learn how the receipt of some benefits
20 might or might not impact whether they are eligible
21 for other benefits and might impact the amount of
22 those other benefits for which they are eligible;

23 (13) include planning and funding for the pilot
24 entities to train their staffs and clients to utilize the
25 new technologies;

1 (14) in rural and other areas without strong
2 broad-band service, integrate activities under the
3 grant with other activities to strengthen local-broad
4 band service;

5 (15) enable low-income individuals to obtain
6 free or reduced price smart phones and free or re-
7 duced-price data services;

8 (16) ensure that individuals without personal
9 smart phone, tablet, or computer access are able to
10 benefit from the systems and technological improve-
11 ments in the pilot projects at public locations such
12 as public libraries, community centers, and social
13 service offices;

14 (17) propose a detailed, workable plan to thor-
15 oughly beta test and field test any new technologies
16 or systems in the pilot project before making such
17 technologies or systems available to all households,
18 individuals, or the entire pilot area; and

19 (18) identify the applicable Federal, State,
20 local, or Tribal statutory and regulatory authorities,
21 including waiver authorities, to be potentially lever-
22 aged to most effectively implement the proposed
23 pilot project.

1 **SEC. 7. HOPE TECHNOLOGY INNOVATION CONTRACTS.**

2 (a) **AUTHORITY.**—The Secretary of Health and
3 Human Services, in consultation with the Secretary of Ag-
4 riculture and the Secretary of Housing and Urban Devel-
5 opment, shall hold a merit-based competition to award
6 HOPE Technology Innovation Contracts to United States-
7 based private businesses and nonprofit organizations de-
8 scribed in section 503(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code
9 of 1986 with relevant, successful experience in technology,
10 to create technology, including mobile applications, widg-
11 ets, and templates that pilot entities can use to create
12 HOPE accounts.

13 (b) **NUMBER OF CONTRACTS.**—The Secretary shall
14 award no more than ten and not fewer than two such con-
15 tracts each fiscal year.

16 (c) **SIZE OF CONTRACTS.**—Contracts may range in
17 size from \$200,000 to \$4,500,000.

18 (d) **AVAILABILITY TO THE PUBLIC.**—All technologies
19 developed with funding provided under this section shall
20 be open-sourced and available to the public for free.

21 (e) **HOUSEHOLD DATA.**—No contractor shall have
22 access to any client or household data through a project
23 under this section, unless such contractor is a contractor
24 or subgrantee for a pilot entity, in which case such con-
25 tractor may have limited, functional access to such data.

1 In no case shall a contractor share or sell client or house-
2 hold data.

3 (f) PREFERENCES.—In making awards under this
4 section, the Secretary of Health and Human Services shall
5 give preference to applicants that ensure the following
6 with respect to the applicable technology:

7 (1) Client-facing technology with top pref-
8 erences mobile device applications and uses and sec-
9 ondary preferences to tablet and computer and
10 texting uses.

11 (2) Incorporate fail-safe systems to maintain
12 the privacy and security of data.

13 (3) Are easily adaptable at the lowest possible
14 financial costs with the least possible staff time by
15 pilot entities and other State, county, city, munic-
16 ipal, and Tribal governments in a manner that can
17 easily be utilized by low-income individuals.

18 (4) Build in the ability to be easily updated as
19 technologies evolve.

20 **SEC. 8. MAINTENANCE OF EFFORT AND NONDISPLACE-**
21 **MENT OF WORKERS.**

22 None of the pilot projects carried out under this Act
23 shall do any of the following:

24 (1) Decrease the overall monetary value of Fed-
25 eral, State, local, or Tribal government funding as-

1 sistance given to any individual or family, although
2 all entities involved could independently, or jointly,
3 increase funding under such projects.

4 (2) Decrease the overall Federal, State, local, or
5 Tribal government funding for antipoverty programs
6 spent by participating pilot communities and agen-
7 cies, although all entities involved may independ-
8 ently, or jointly, increase funding.

9 (3) Lengthen the amount of time or increase
10 the requirements necessary to receive any govern-
11 ment benefits, or in any way make it more difficult
12 to obtain any form of government assistance.

13 (4) Limit the legal rights of anyone in the tar-
14 get populations to receive government or nonprofit
15 assistance.

16 (5) Decrease overall public sector employment
17 in any eligible pilot community, but public employees
18 could be transferred at similar or higher salaries and
19 pay grades from positions that oversee paperwork to
20 positions that provide direct services to the public,
21 assuming such transfers do not violate collective bar-
22 raining agreements or their other rights as public
23 employees.

24 (6) Decrease or increase work requirements for
25 existing government programs.

1 (7) Reduce program integrity measures or in-
2 crease the possibility of fraud in any government
3 program.

4 (8) Track or monitor the physical location or
5 immigration status of immigrants, be used for any
6 immigration enforcement activity against any indi-
7 viduals, or be used to provide any data whatsoever
8 to agencies involved in immigration enforcement ac-
9 tivities or policy.

10 (9) Enable any pilot entity or contractor, sub-
11 contractor, or partner of any pilot entity to share or
12 sell client or household data obtained through those
13 projects.

14 (10) Eliminate the existing ability of applicants
15 to apply for, recertify, or manage government bene-
16 fits by physically visiting a government office.

17 **SEC. 9. ANNUAL REPORTS TO CONGRESS.**

18 (a) REPORT.—Not later than September 30 of each
19 of fiscal years 2021 through 2027, the Secretaries shall
20 submit to Congress a report on the results of pilot projects
21 carried out under this Act.

22 (b) CONTENTS OF REPORT.—Each report under sub-
23 section (a) shall include detailed data on the extent to
24 which the pilot makes it easier, quicker, and less costly
25 for low-income individuals to access a variety of benefits,

1 the extent to which the pilot will save administrative funds
2 over the long-term, the extent to which the accuracy and
3 integrity of the benefits programs included are maintained
4 or improved, and the extent to which low-income house-
5 holds are able to more easily obtain free or low-cost bank-
6 ing services.

7 **SEC. 10. AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS; TECH-**
8 **NICAL ASSISTANCE AUTHORIZED.**

9 (a) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There is
10 authorized to be appropriated to carry out this Act for
11 each of the fiscal years 2021 through 2026—

12 (1) \$10,000,000 to the Secretary of Housing
13 and Urban Development, of which \$500,000 shall be
14 used internally by the Department of Housing and
15 Urban Development for staff and other expenses to
16 plan, award, and oversee pilot projects under this
17 Act and \$9,500,000 shall be available for grants
18 under section 6;

19 (2) \$10,000,000 to the Secretary of Agri-
20 culture, of which \$500,000 shall be used internally
21 by Department of Agriculture for staff and other ex-
22 penses to plan, award, and oversee pilot projects
23 under this Act and \$9,500,000 shall be available for
24 grants under section 6; and

1 (3) \$15,000,000 to the Secretary of Health and
2 Human Services, of which \$500,000 shall be used
3 internally by the Department of Health and Human
4 Services for staff and other expenses to plan, award,
5 and oversee pilot projects under this Act and
6 \$9,500,000 shall be available for grants under sec-
7 tion 6, and 5,000,000 shall be available for contracts
8 under section 7.

9 (b) TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AUTHORIZED.—The
10 Secretary of Health and Human Services, the Secretary
11 of Agriculture, the Secretary of Housing and Urban De-
12 velopment, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, the Sec-
13 retary of the Interior, the Secretary of Labor, the Com-
14 missioner of the Internal Revenue Service, the Chief Exec-
15 utive Officer of the Corporation for National and Commu-
16 nity Service, the Administrator of the Small Business Ad-
17 ministration, the Director of the Office of Management
18 and Budget, the Office of Science and Technology, the
19 Chairman of the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation,
20 and the Domestic Policy Council may, for the purpose of
21 advancing the objectives of the pilot projects carried out
22 under this Act—

23 (1) provide technical assistance;

24 (2) solicit voluntary, nonmonetary assistance
25 from institutions of higher education, credit unions,

1 and private sector technology companies, banks, and
2 financial institutions; and

3 (3) inform eligible entities of the applicable
4 Federal, State, local, or Tribal statutory and regu-
5 latory authorities, including waiver authorities.

6 (c) PERSISTENT POVERTY COUNTIES.—

7 (1) ALLOCATION REQUIREMENT.—Of the
8 amount appropriated for a fiscal year to carry out
9 this Act, at least 10 percent shall be allocated to
10 provide assistance in persistent poverty counties.

11 (2) DEFINITION.—For purposes of this section,
12 the term “persistent poverty counties” means any
13 county that has had 20 percent or more of its popu-
14 lation living in poverty over the past 30 years, as
15 measured by the 1990, 2000, and 2010 decennial
16 censuses.

○