

118TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

S. 1579

To improve the process for awarding grants under certain programs of the Department of Transportation to certain counties in which the majority of land is owned or managed by the Federal Government and to other units of local government and Tribal governments in those counties, and for other purposes.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

MAY 11, 2023

Ms. CORTEZ MASTO (for herself and Mr. DAINES) introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation

A BILL

To improve the process for awarding grants under certain programs of the Department of Transportation to certain counties in which the majority of land is owned or managed by the Federal Government and to other units of local government and Tribal governments in those counties, 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,*

1 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

2 This Act may be cited as the “More Opportunities
3 for Rural Economies from DOT Grants Act” or the
4 “MORE DOT Grants Act”.

5 **SEC. 2. DEFINITIONS.**

6 In this Act:

7 (1) **HIGH-DENSITY PUBLIC LAND COUNTY.**—

8 The term “High-Density Public Land County”
9 means a county (or equivalent jurisdiction) of a
10 State or territory of the United States—

11 (A) that has a population of not more than
12 100,000 people, according to the most recent
13 annual estimates of population by the Bureau
14 of the Census; and

15 (B) in which more than 50 percent of the
16 land is owned or managed by the Federal Gov-
17 ernment.

18 (2) **QUALIFYING GRANT PROGRAM.**—The term
19 “qualifying grant program” means—

20 (A) the program for national infrastruc-
21 ture investments (commonly known as the “Re-
22 building American Infrastructure with Sustain-
23 ability and Equity (RAISE) discretionary grant
24 program”) authorized under the heading “NA-
25 TIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENTS”
26 under the heading “OFFICE OF THE SEC-

1 RETARY” in title I of division L of the Consoli-
2 dated Appropriations Act, 2018 (Public Law
3 115–141; 132 Stat. 972) (or a subsequent ap-
4 propriations Act);

5 (B) the national infrastructure project as-
6 sistance program (commonly known as the
7 “Mega Grant program”) established by section
8 6701 of title 49, United States Code;

9 (C) the nationally significant multimodal
10 freight and highway projects program (com-
11 monly known as the “Infrastructure for Re-
12 building America (INFRA) grant program”) es-
13 tablished by section 117 of title 23, United
14 States Code;

15 (D) the rural surface transportation grant
16 program established under section 173 of title
17 23, United States Code;

18 (E) the Reconnecting Communities Pilot
19 Program established under section 11509 of the
20 Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (23
21 U.S.C. 101 note; Public Law 117–58);

22 (F) the Strengthening Mobility and Revo-
23 lutionizing Transportation (SMART) Grant
24 Program established under section 25005 of the

1 Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (23
2 U.S.C. 502 note; Public Law 117–58);

3 (G) the Grants for Buses and Bus Facili-
4 ties competitive grant program established
5 under section 5339(b) of title 49, United States
6 Code;

7 (H) the public transportation Low or No
8 Emission Vehicle Program established under
9 section 5339(c) of title 49, United States Code;

10 (I) the public transportation innovation
11 grant program established under section 5312
12 of title 49, United States Code;

13 (J) the public transportation safety pro-
14 gram established under section 5329 of title 49,
15 United States Code;

16 (K) the Federal lands access program
17 under section 204 of title 23, United States
18 Code;

19 (L) the airport improvement program es-
20 tablished under subchapter I of chapter 471 of
21 title 49, United States Code;

22 (M) the consolidated rail infrastructure
23 and safety improvements program under section
24 22907 of title 49, United States Code; and

1 (N) any other discretionary grant program
2 of the Department of Transportation under
3 which grants are awarded to—

- 4 (i) counties;
5 (ii) other units of local government; or
6 (iii) Tribal governments.

7 (3) SECRETARY.—The term “Secretary” means
8 the Secretary of Transportation.

9 (4) TRIBAL GOVERNMENT.—The term “Tribal
10 government” means the recognized governing body
11 of any Indian or Alaska Native tribe, band, nation,
12 pueblo, village, community, component band, or com-
13 ponent reservation, individually identified (including
14 parenthetically) in the list published most recently as
15 of the date of enactment of this Act pursuant to sec-
16 tion 104 of the Federally Recognized Indian Tribe
17 List Act of 1994 (25 U.S.C. 5131).

18 **SEC. 3. GRANTS.**

19 (a) REDUCTION IN LOCAL MATCHING REQUIRE-
20 MENTS.—Notwithstanding any other provision of law,
21 with respect to a High-Density Public Land County and
22 any unit of local government or Tribal government within
23 a High-Density Public Land County, any requirement for
24 local matching funds under a qualifying grant program
25 shall be reduced by 50 percent.

1 (b) TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE.—On request of a High-
 2 Density Public Land County or any unit of local govern-
 3 ment or Tribal government within a High-Density Public
 4 Land County, the Secretary shall provide additional tech-
 5 nical assistance to the High-Density Public Land County,
 6 unit of local government, or Tribal government before and
 7 during the annual application period for each qualifying
 8 grant program.

9 (c) PRIORITY.—

10 (1) APPLICATION APPROVAL.—In approving ap-
 11 plications for a qualifying grant program, the Sec-
 12 retary shall give priority to an application from a
 13 High-Density Public Land County, unit of local gov-
 14 ernment within a High-Density Public Land County,
 15 or Tribal government within a High-Density Public
 16 Land County that has not received support under
 17 the qualifying grant program during the 10-year pe-
 18 riod preceding the date of the application.

19 (2) TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND OTHER SUP-
 20 PORT.—In carrying out subsections (b) and (c), the
 21 Secretary may give priority to a Tribal government
 22 within a High-Density Public Land County.

23 (d) SPECIAL CONSIDERATION.—In approving appli-
 24 cations for a qualifying grant program, the Secretary—

1 (1) shall give special consideration to an appli-
2 cation from a High-Density Public Land County or
3 unit of local government within a High-Density Pub-
4 lic Land County with respect to any rural set-aside
5 designated for the applicable qualifying grant pro-
6 gram by an Act of Congress; and

7 (2) may give special consideration to an appli-
8 cation from a Tribal government within a High-Den-
9 sity Public Land County with respect to a rural set-
10 aside described in paragraph (1).

11 (e) OTHER SUPPORT.—The Secretary may provide
12 additional support, as the Secretary determines to be ap-
13 propriate, for a High-Density Public Land County or a
14 unit of local government or Tribal government within a
15 High-Density Public Land County, including by consid-
16 ering and, if appropriate, offering flexibility with respect
17 to any requirement of, or barrier to applying for or receiv-
18 ing assistance under, a qualifying grant program if the
19 requirement or barrier relates to—

20 (1) scoring criteria relating to numerical size
21 and impact, such as the number of jobs created or
22 the number of people served, which disadvantage
23 small and isolated communities;

24 (2) any requirement that an applicant for a
25 qualifying grant program partner with other institu-

1 tions, such as community colleges or foundations,
2 which may not operate in the jurisdiction of the
3 High-Density Public Land County, unit of local gov-
4 ernment, or Tribal government seeking assistance
5 under the qualifying grant program;

6 (3) any financial or cash-on-hand requirement
7 that a High-Density Public Land County or a unit
8 of local government or Tribal government within a
9 High-Density Public Land County cannot meet for
10 reasons other than any financial constraints to
11 which the High-Density Public Land County, unit of
12 local government, or Tribal government is subject; or

13 (4) an overly complicated or overly technical ap-
14 plication for a qualifying grant program that deters
15 High-Density Public Land Counties or units of local
16 government or Tribal governments within High-Den-
17 sity Public Land Counties from applying for the
18 qualifying grant program.

○