

**Statement for Rep. Derek Kilmer (WA-06)**  
**House Agriculture Committee**  
**Member Day Hearing**  
**December 6, 2023**

Chair Thompson and Ranking Member Scott, thank you for holding this hearing.

Forty-nine years ago, I was born in a rural hospital in Port Angeles, Washington. Over the years, my family and I received high-quality, accessible care from providers at this hospital – providers who are from the community and genuinely care about the place they call home.

But the future of health care in rural communities faces extraordinary challenges, including rural hospital closures, workforce shortages, and increasing costs of care.

Rural populations often bear the brunt of health care disparities. They usually skew older, have less income, and often have complex health issues.

Under these combined pressures, more than 400 rural hospitals today are at risk of permanent closure.

The rural-urban health care divide is a crisis that demands urgent attention from Congress.

That's why I was proud to introduce the Rural Hospital Technical Assistance Program Act (H.R.4713) with my colleague from Texas, Representative Ronny Jackson.

This bipartisan legislation would codify an existing USDA program that provides targeted, specialized technical assistance to rural hospitals to help them strengthen essential healthcare services, improve financial and operational performance, and ultimately keep lights on and the doors open.

The Rural Hospital Technical Assistance Program Act is critical in bridging the gap of health care disparities we see every day, and I respectfully ask the committee to consider taking up this important legislation.

I also ask the committee to consider the REACH Our Tribes Act (H.R.5113), bipartisan and bicameral legislation to improve USDA programs for Tribes.

I have the great honor of having 12 Tribes in my district. The majority are in rural areas and benefit from USDA programs to build community facilities, get internet access, and spur economic development.

But, too often, Tribal communities haven't been able to take advantage of USDA resources due to a variety of factors, including the fact that these programs weren't designed with Tribes in mind, have burdensome application requirements, and just don't seem to reach Indian Country.

That's why I introduced the REACH Our Tribes Act (H.R.5113) with my colleague, Rep. Nick Langworthy. Senators Mike Rounds and Maria Cantwell recently introduced companion legislation in the Senate.

The REACH Our Tribes Act aims to enhance the efficacy of the USDA's economic and rural development programs for Tribal entities by implementing commonsense, no-cost recommendations made by the Government Accountability Office.

First, the bill would require USDA to establish a formal consultation process for annual budget requests and the Farm Bill. This move would promote collaboration and equity in decisions regarding budget allocations and reauthorizations.

The bill would also require USDA to report on obligations made to Tribal entities, addressing the current data gap, and enhancing our understanding of program impact, potential service gaps, and Tribal utilization.

The REACH Our Tribes Act also fosters inter-agency collaboration for economic development programs, seeking to streamline planning, application requirements, and stakeholder engagement across the USDA, HUD, and the Economic Development Administration.

Finally, our bill calls for the establishment of a repository of federal economic development programs available to Tribal entities, managed by the Department of Commerce's Office of Native American Business Development. This repository will offer a centralized and up-to-date source of information, facilitating Tribal entities' access to relevant programs.

The REACH Our Tribes Act not only acknowledges the sovereign rights of Tribal nations but also equips us with the knowledge required to enhance service delivery and utilization for Tribes and is endorsed by the National Congress of American Indians and the Native Farm Bill Coalition.

Thank you for your time, and I look forward to working with you on these two key priorities: the Rural Hospital Technical Assistance Program Act and the REACH Our Tribes Act.

I yield back.