

Amendment offered by Ms. McClain Delaney

Brief description

This amendment would direct the Rural Utilities Service (RUS) to create a digital platform for tracking project permits, establish a permitting preplanning grant program, align RUS Notices of Funding Opportunity, require all RUS applications to be submitted online, and mandate that the Secretary of Agriculture evaluate RUS processes and report findings to Congress.

AMENDMENT
OFFERED BY MRS. MCCLAIN DELANEY OF
MARYLAND

At the end of subtitle C of title VI, add the following:

1 **SEC. ____ . ESTABLISHMENT OF WEB-BASED PLATFORM TO**
2 **ENABLE RECIPIENTS OF FEDERAL FINAN-**
3 **CIAL ASSISTANCE ADMINISTERED BY THE**
4 **RURAL UTILITIES SERVICE TO TRACK THE**
5 **STATUS OF THEIR PROJECTS THROUGHOUT**
6 **THE PERMITTING AND REVIEW PROCESS.**

7 (a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary, through the Rural
8 Utilities Service, shall establish, operate, and maintain a
9 secure, web-based platform that is designed to improve
10 predictability and accountability for recipients of Federal
11 financial assistance administered by the Rural Utilities
12 Service, by enabling the recipients to track the status of
13 their projects throughout the permitting and review pro-
14 cess (including environmental and interagency coordina-
15 tion).

16 (b) REQUIREMENTS.—In carrying out subsection (a),
17 the Secretary shall—

1 (1) require the Rural Utilities Service to deter-
2 mine, establish, and implement user access mecha-
3 nisms enabling the recipients to view permitting and
4 review status for their projects;

5 (2) require clear status indicators and esti-
6 mated timelines for each phase of the permitting
7 and review process for projects assisted by the Rural
8 Utilities Service;

9 (3) ensure that, through the platform, docu-
10 ments may be uploaded and downloaded and appli-
11 cants may correspond with relevant Rural Utilities
12 Service offices;

13 (4) ensure that automated notifications are pro-
14 vided to recipients when a project advances to a new
15 review stage or when additional information or ac-
16 tion is required;

17 (5) direct the Rural Utilities Service to coordi-
18 nate, as appropriate, with—

19 (A) other agencies of the Department;

20 (B) the Department of Commerce;

21 (C) the Department of Defense;

22 (D) the Department of Energy;

23 (E) the Department of the Interior;

24 (F) the Department of Transportation;

25 (G) the General Services Administration;

1 (H) the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers;
2 and

3 (I) any relevant Federal permitting au-
4 thorities,

5 including environmental reviews conducted pursuant
6 to the National Environmental Policy Act and the
7 National Historic Preservation Act, while maintain-
8 ing the responsibility of the Rural Utilities Service
9 for project status reporting.

10 (c) ANNUAL REPORTS.—Within 2 years after the
11 date of the enactment of this Act, and annually thereafter,
12 the Secretary of Agriculture shall submit to Congress a
13 written report that describes the development, implemen-
14 tation, use, and performance of the platform.

15 (d) LIMITATIONS ON AUTHORIZATION OF APPRO-
16 PRIATIONS.—

17 (1) IN GENERAL.—To carry out this section,
18 there are authorized to be appropriated to the Sec-
19 retary a total of not more than \$30,000,000, of
20 which—

21 (A) a total of not less than \$20,000,000
22 and not more than \$24,000,000 may shall be
23 available for fiscal years 2026 and 2027 for de-
24 velopment of the platform; and

1 (B) a total of not less than \$6,000,000
2 and not more than \$10,000,000 shall be avail-
3 able for each of fiscal years 2028 through 2035
4 for operation and maintenance of the platform.

5 (2) AVAILABILITY.—The amounts made avail-
6 able by paragraph (1) are authorized to remain
7 available until expended.

8 **SEC. ____ . RURAL UTILITIES SERVICE PREPLANNING EDU-**
9 **CATION AND PLANNING GRANTS.**

10 (a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary, acting through the
11 Administrator of the Rural Utilities Service, shall make
12 grants to eligible entities for predevelopment planning,
13 permitting, and early-stage project preparation activities
14 under any program administered by the Rural Utilities
15 Service.

16 (b) ELIGIBLE ENTITIES.—An entity is eligible for a
17 grant under this section if the entity is qualified to partici-
18 pate in a program administered by the Rural Utilities
19 Service and is unable to finance predevelopment work by
20 borrowing or other means.

21 (c) COST-SHARING.—The amount of each grant
22 under this section shall be not more than 75 percent of
23 the cost of the activities for which the grant is made.

1 (d) USE OF FUNDS.—The recipient of a grant under
2 this section shall use the grant for pre-development activi-
3 ties such as—

4 (1) feasibility studies, permitting, design assist-
5 ance, and other pre-development planning activities;

6 (2) technical assistance and training to improve
7 planning and readiness for a program administered
8 by the Rural Utilities Service; or

9 (3) participation in a partnerships with a Fed-
10 eral, State, Tribal, or local entity to support project
11 preparation.

12 (e) PROHIBITION.—A grant under this section shall
13 not be used to reimburse costs of work completed before
14 the grant is made.

15 (f) ADMINISTRATIVE PROVISIONS.—

16 (1) GUIDELINES.—The Secretary shall issue
17 guidelines relating to applications for grants under
18 this section, selection of grantees, and administra-
19 tion of the grants.

20 (2) LIMITATION ON ADMINISTRATIVE COSTS.—

21 In administering this section, the Secretary shall
22 limit administrative costs incurred pursuant to this
23 section, to ensure that funds made available to carry
24 out this section are used for predevelopment activi-
25 ties to the maximum extent practicable.

1 (g) REPORTS.—The recipient of a grant under this
2 section shall transmit annual reports to the Secretary on
3 the activities funded with the grant and the outcomes of
4 the activities.

5 (h) LIMITATIONS ON AUTHORIZATION OF APPRO-
6 PRIATIONS.—To carry out this section, there are author-
7 ized to be appropriated not more than \$15,000,000 for
8 each of fiscal years 2026 through 2035.

9 **SEC. ____ . NOTICE OF FUNDING OPPORTUNITY**
10 **TIMELINES.**

11 (a) ISSUANCE OF REGULATIONS.—Within 6 months
12 after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary,
13 acting through Rural Development and the Administrator
14 of the Rural Utilities Service, shall prescribe final regula-
15 tions to improve timelines for notices of funding oppor-
16 tunity for grants administered by the Rural Utilities Serv-
17 ice, that should provide for—

18 (1) a uniform notice of funding opportunity
19 timeline applicable to all Rural Utilities Service
20 grant programs;

21 (2) sector-specific notice of funding opportunity
22 timelines for major program areas of the Rural Util-
23 ities Service, including—

24 (A) electricity;

1 (B) telecommunications, including tele-
2 phone and broadband;

3 (C) broadband distance learning and tele-
4 medicine; and

5 (D) water and waste disposal; or

6 (3) if the approaches described in paragraphs
7 (1) and (2) are not practicable, an alternative ap-
8 proach to improving predictability and coordination
9 of notice of funding opportunity timelines.

10 (b) IMPLEMENTATION.—The Secretary shall imple-
11 ment the final regulations within 18 months after the date
12 of the enactment of this Act.

13 **SEC. ____ . ONLINE GRANT APPLICATIONS.**

14 Within 2 years after the date of the enactment of this
15 Act, the Administrator of the Rural Utilities Service shall
16 require all applications for a grant administered by the
17 Rural Utilities Service to be submitted electronically
18 through an online system or, if such an applicant is unable
19 to so submit such an application, provide alternative
20 means for the applicant to submit the application.

21 **SEC. ____ . STAFF ASSESSMENT AND REPORT TO CON-**
22 **GRESS.**

23 (a) STAFF ASSESSMENT.—The Secretary shall evalu-
24 ate the processes used by the staff of the Rural Utilities
25 Service to—

1 (1) review applications for assistance from pro-
2 grams administered by the Rural Utilities Service;
3 (2) provide related technical assistance; and
4 (3) monitor assistance awardees,
5 with the goal of maximizing the efficiency and effective-
6 ness of the programs.

7 (b) REPORT TO CONGRESS.—2 years after the date
8 of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary and the Ad-
9 ministrator of the Rural Utilities Service shall jointly pre-
10 pare and submit to the Committee on Agriculture of the
11 House of Representatives and the Committee on Agri-
12 culture, Nutrition, and Forestry of the Senate a report
13 that—

14 (1) examines, at a minimum—

15 (A) the workload of the staff of the Rural
16 Utilities Service, the allocation of the workload,
17 and the efficiency of the staff in reviewing ap-
18 plications and assisting applicants for assist-
19 ance under the programs administered by the
20 Rural Utilities Service; and

21 (B) the timeliness, consistency, and quality
22 of technical assistance provided and award deci-
23 sions made under the programs; and

24 (2) sets forth—

1 (A) recommendations to enhance the effec-
2 tiveness of the online permitting platform estab-
3 lished under the 4th preceding section of this
4 Act;

5 (B) an assessment of how permitting for
6 projects assisted by the Rural Utilities Service
7 could be expedited; and

8 (C) findings that could strengthen service
9 delivery to rural communities.

