

116TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. R. 4352

To amend part B of title IV of the Social Security Act to provide grants to develop and enhance, or to evaluate, kinship navigator programs, and for other purposes.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SEPTEMBER 17, 2019

Ms. BASS (for herself, Mr. LANGEVIN, Mr. BACON, Mrs. LAWRENCE, and Mr. MITCHELL) introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Ways and Means

A BILL

To amend part B of title IV of the Social Security Act to provide grants to develop and enhance, or to evaluate, kinship navigator programs, 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 “Supporting Kinship
5 Connections Act”.

6 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS.**

7 Congress makes the following findings:

1 (1) 2,500,000 children in the United States are
2 living in kinship care with grandparents or other rel-
3 atives.

4 (2) With the rise of substance abuse, including
5 heroin and other opioid-use, more kin caregivers are
6 stepping up to raise children who are in need of fos-
7 ter care and permanent homes.

8 (3) Grandparents and relatives residing in
9 urban, rural, and suburban households in every
10 county of the United States have stepped forward
11 out of love and loyalty to care for children during
12 times in which parents are unable to do so.

13 (4) Kinship caregivers provide safety, promote
14 well-being, and establish stable households for vul-
15 nerable children.

16 (5) Kinship care enables a child to maintain
17 family relationships and cultural heritage and re-
18 main in the community of the child.

19 (6) Kinship care is a national resource that pro-
20 vides loving homes for children at risk.

21 (7) Kinship caregivers face daunting challenges
22 to keep countless children from entering foster care.

23 (8) Kinship navigator programs have been
24 shown to proactively provide support to kinship care-

1 givers in an effort to avert crises and potentially
2 prevent more costly services.

3 (9) Kinship placement decreases the likelihood
4 that children will run away and end up on the
5 streets where they are at risk of trafficking.

6 (10) Children in kinship placements are less
7 likely to be moved from placement to placement.

8 (11) Children in kinship placements are less
9 likely to struggle with behavioral health and less
10 likely to be maltreated.

11 **SEC. 3. GRANTS TO DEVELOP, ENHANCE, OR EVALUATE**
12 **KINSHIP NAVIGATOR PROGRAMS.**

13 (a) IN GENERAL.—Section 427 of the Social Security
14 Act (42 U.S.C. 627) is amended to read as follows:

15 **“SEC. 427. KINSHIP NAVIGATOR PROGRAM GRANTS.**

16 “(a) AUTHORITY.—The Secretary shall make grants
17 to States, to Indian tribes, tribal organizations, or tribal
18 consortia, and to community-based organizations to de-
19 velop and enhance kinship navigator programs, or to
20 evaluate such programs, in order to promote the use of
21 kinship navigator programs by all such entities, and to ad-
22 vance the knowledge and use of kinship navigator pro-
23 grams that meet—

24 “(1) the evidence-based practices criteria to
25 qualify for payments under section 474(a)(7); and

1 “(2) the requirements described in subsection
2 (b)(1) of this section.

3 “(b) PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS.—

4 “(1) MANDATORY REQUIREMENTS.—The re-
5 quirements described in this paragraph are the fol-
6 lowing:

7 “(A) The kinship navigator program is de-
8 signed to assist kinship caregivers in learning
9 about, finding, and using programs and services
10 to meet the needs of the children they are as-
11 sisting or raising, and their own needs, and to
12 promote effective partnerships among public
13 and private agencies to ensure kinship caregiver
14 families are served.

15 “(B) The kinship navigator program is co-
16 ordinated with other State or local agencies
17 that promote service coordination or provide in-
18 formation and referral services, including the
19 entities that provide 2–1–1 or 3–1–1 informa-
20 tion systems where available, to avoid duplica-
21 tion or fragmentation of services to kinship care
22 families.

23 “(C) The kinship navigator program is
24 planned and operated in consultation with kin-
25 ship caregivers and organizations representing

1 them, youth raised by kinship caregivers, rel-
2 evant government agencies, and relevant com-
3 munity-based or faith-based organizations.

4 “(D) The kinship navigator program estab-
5 lishes information and referral systems that
6 link (via toll-free access) kinship caregivers,
7 kinship support group facilitators, and kinship
8 service providers to—

9 “(i) each other;

10 “(ii) eligibility and enrollment infor-
11 mation for Federal, State, and local bene-
12 fits;

13 “(iii) relevant training to assist kin-
14 ship caregivers in caregiving and in obtain-
15 ing benefits and services; and

16 “(iv) relevant legal assistance and
17 help in obtaining legal services.

18 “(E) The kinship navigator program pro-
19 vides outreach to kinship care families, includ-
20 ing by establishing, distributing, and updating a
21 kinship care website, or other relevant guides or
22 outreach materials.

23 “(F) The kinship navigator program pro-
24 motes—

1 “(i) partnerships between public and
2 private agencies, including schools and uni-
3 versities, community-based or faith-based
4 organizations, and relevant government
5 agencies, to increase their knowledge of the
6 needs of kinship care families and other in-
7 dividuals who are willing and able to assist
8 parents to help prevent children from en-
9 tering foster care or to be foster parents;
10 and

11 “(ii) improved services for such fami-
12 lies and individuals.

13 “(2) ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES.—In addition to
14 meeting the requirements described in paragraph
15 (1), a grant under this section may be used to assist
16 a kinship navigator program in—

17 “(A) establishing and supporting a kinship
18 care ombudsman with authority to intervene
19 and help kinship caregivers access services;

20 “(B) supporting any other activities de-
21 signed to assist kinship caregivers in obtaining
22 benefits and services to improve their caregiv-
23 ing, including in-person supportive services;

24 “(C) negotiating, managing, and imple-
25 menting agreements to enable the kinship navi-

1 gator program obtain data from the informa-
2 tion systems used to carry out a State program
3 funded under part A, or a State plan developed
4 in accordance with this subpart, or approved
5 under subpart 2 of this part; and

6 “(D) public education and awareness of
7 kinship placement and processes.

8 “(c) APPLICATIONS.—In order to receive a grant
9 under this section, a State, Indian tribe, tribal organiza-
10 tion, tribal consortium, or community-based organization
11 shall submit to the Secretary an application, at such time
12 and in such manner as the Secretary shall require, that
13 contains the following:

14 “(1) A description of how the grant will be used
15 to develop, enhance, or evaluate kinship navigator
16 programs that meets the requirements of subsection
17 (b)(1), and whether the State or tribal entity intends
18 to carry out any of the activities described in sub-
19 section (b)(2).

20 “(2) A description of how kinship caregivers
21 and the children they care for will be identified and
22 an initial projection of the number of children and
23 kin caregivers that will be served.

24 “(3) A description of how the State or tribal
25 entity intends to make its kinship navigator program

1 available as broadly as possible, including on a state-
2 wide (or, in the case of a tribal entity, multi-State)
3 basis whenever possible.

4 “(4) A description of how the State intends to
5 sustain the kinship navigator program after the end
6 of the grant funding, including through use of fund-
7 ing available under section 474(a)(7).

8 “(5) An assurance that the State, Indian tribe,
9 tribal organization, tribal consortium, or community-
10 based organization will cooperate fully with any eval-
11 uation provided for by the Secretary with respect to
12 grants made under this section.

13 “(6) Any other information that the Secretary
14 may require.

15 “(d) GRANT ALLOTMENTS AND PAYMENTS.—

16 “(1) ALLOTMENTS TO STATES, TRIBES, OR
17 COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS.—Subject to the
18 succeeding paragraphs of this subsection, from the
19 amounts appropriated to carry out this section for a
20 fiscal year, after the application of the amounts re-
21 served under subsection (e) for the fiscal year, the
22 Secretary shall allot to each State that has sub-
23 mitted an application for a grant under this section
24 (and to each Indian tribe, tribal organization, or
25 tribal consortium that has submitted an application

1 for a grant to be paid from an allotment under this
2 paragraph) for the fiscal year an amount equal to
3 the sum of—

4 “(A) \$200,000; and

5 “(B) the product of—

6 “(i) the amount remaining after mak-
7 ing the reservations required under sub-
8 section (e), and allotting the amount de-
9 scribed in subparagraph (A) to each such
10 State and each such Indian tribe, tribal or-
11 ganization, or tribal consortium, for the
12 fiscal year; and

13 “(ii) the proportion that the number
14 of children in the State, Indian tribe, tribal
15 organization, or tribal consortium for the
16 fiscal year bears to the total number of
17 children for all the States (and all the In-
18 dian tribes, tribal organizations, and tribal
19 consortia provided with a grant paid from
20 an allotment under this paragraph) for the
21 fiscal year.

22 “(2) ALLOTMENTS TO CERTAIN TERRI-
23 TORIES.—In the case of an allotment determined
24 under paragraph (1) for the United States Virgin Is-
25 lands, Guam, American Samoa, or the Northern

1 Mariana Islands, the Secretary may reduce the
2 amount of the allotment based on the need of the
3 territory, but not below a minimum amount that the
4 Secretary determines is sufficient to enable the terri-
5 tory to carry out the purposes of a grant made
6 under this section.

7 “(3) INDIAN TRIBES OR TRIBAL CONSORTIA.—
8 From the amount reserved under subsection (e)(1)
9 for a fiscal year, the Secretary shall allot to each In-
10 dian tribe, tribal organization, and tribal consortium
11 that has submitted an application for a grant under
12 this section (other than from an allotment under
13 paragraph (1)) for the fiscal year an amount that
14 bears the same ratio to such reserved amount as the
15 number of children in the Indian tribe, tribal organi-
16 zation, or tribal consortium for the fiscal year bears
17 to the total number of children in all Indian tribes
18 and tribal organizations that have submitted an ap-
19 plication for a grant under this section (other than
20 from an allotment under paragraph (1)) for the fis-
21 cal year, as determined by the Secretary on the basis
22 of the most current and reliable information avail-
23 able to the Secretary. If a consortium of Indian
24 tribes applies and is approved for a grant under this
25 section, the Secretary shall allot to the consortium

1 an amount equal to the sum of the allotments deter-
2 mined for each Indian tribe and tribal organization
3 that is part of the consortium.

4 “(4) PAYMENTS.—Payments of grants under
5 this section may be made in advance or by way of
6 reimbursement, and in such installments, as the Sec-
7 retary may determine, and shall be made on such
8 conditions as the Secretary finds necessary to carry
9 out the purposes of the grants.

10 “(5) AVAILABILITY OF FUNDS.—Amounts allot-
11 ted under this subsection to a State, an Indian tribe,
12 a tribal organization, a tribal consortium, or a com-
13 munity-based organization for a fiscal year shall re-
14 main available for expenditure through the end of
15 the succeeding fiscal year.

16 “(6) NO MATCHING PAYMENT REQUIRED.—No
17 matching payment shall apply to the grants made
18 under this section.

19 “(e) RESERVATIONS OF FUNDS.—

20 “(1) INDIAN TRIBES, TRIBAL ORGANIZATIONS,
21 OR TRIBAL CONSORTIA.—The Secretary shall reserve
22 5 percent of the funds appropriated for a fiscal year
23 to carry out this section, for grants to Indian tribes,
24 tribal organizations, or tribal consortia not provided

1 a grant from an allotment under subsection (d)(1)
2 for the fiscal year.

3 “(2) TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE, EVALUATIONS,
4 AND GUIDANCE.—The Secretary shall reserve 5 per-
5 cent of the funds appropriated for a fiscal year to
6 carry out this section to provide technical assistance,
7 evaluations emphasizing community-based participa-
8 tory methods that align programs with local knowl-
9 edge and community values, and guidance to grant-
10 ees, and to carry out, by grant, contract, or inter-
11 agency agreement, cross-site evaluations for pur-
12 poses of identifying evidence-based practices criteria
13 that will qualify for payment under section
14 474(a)(7).

15 “(f) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—In addi-
16 tion to any amounts otherwise appropriated to carry out
17 this subpart, there are authorized to be appropriated to
18 the Secretary for purposes of making grants under this
19 section, \$15,000,000 for each of fiscal years 2020 and
20 2021, to remain available until expended.

21 “(g) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

22 “(1) INDIAN TRIBE; TRIBAL ORGANIZATION.—
23 The terms ‘Indian tribe’ and ‘tribal organization’
24 have the meanings given such terms in section
25 428(c).

1 “(2) STATE.—The term ‘State’ has the mean-
2 ing given that term in section 1101 for purposes of
3 this title and includes the Northern Mariana Is-
4 lands.”.

5 (b) CONFORMING AMENDMENTS.—

6 (1) Section 474(a)(7) of such Act (42 U.S.C.
7 674(a)(7)) is amended by striking “section
8 427(a)(1)” and inserting “section 427(b)(1)”.

9 (2) Section 476 of such Act (42 U.S.C. 676) is
10 amended—

11 (A) in subsection (c)(2)(A)(ii)—

12 (i) in subclause (I), by striking “and”
13 after the semicolon; and

14 (ii) by inserting after subclause (II)
15 the following:

16 “(III) Indian tribes, tribal orga-
17 nizations, or tribal consortia seeking
18 to develop and enhance kinship navi-
19 gator programs, or to evaluate such
20 programs, in order to promote their
21 use by tribal entities, and to advance
22 the knowledge and use of kinship nav-
23 igator programs that meet the evi-
24 dence-based practices to qualify for
25 payments under section 474(a)(7) and

1 the requirements described in section
2 427(b)(1); and”; and

3 (B) in subsection (d)(2), by striking “sec-
4 tion 427(a)(1)” and inserting “section
5 427(b)(1)”.

6 (c) TECHNICAL AMENDMENTS.—

7 (1) Section 428(c) of such Act (42 U.S.C.
8 628(c)) is amended by striking “by subsections (e)
9 and (l) of section 4 of the Indian Self-Determination
10 and Education Assistance Act (25 U.S.C. 450b), re-
11 spectively” and inserting “under section 4 of the In-
12 dian Self Determination and Education Assistance
13 Act (25 U.S.C. 5304)”.

14 (2) Section 479B(a) of such Act (42 U.S.C.
15 679c(a)) is amended by striking “450b” and insert-
16 ing “5304”.

17 (d) EFFECTIVE DATE.—The amendments made by
18 this section shall take effect on October 1, 2019.

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