To require the Secretary of Health and Human Services to fund demonstration projects to improve recruitment and retention of child welfare workers.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on

A BILL

To require the Secretary of Health and Human Services to fund demonstration projects to improve recruitment and retention of child welfare workers.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the “Child Welfare Workforce Support Act”.

SEC. 2. PURPOSE.

The purpose of this Act is to demonstrate the impact of recruitment and retention strategies in the child welfare workforce and identify effective evidence-based strategies
for improved worker recruitment, retention, and advancement.

SEC. 3. DEFINITIONS.

In this Act—

(1) the term “caseworker” means an individual employed or contracted by a State who works in the field of prevention, identification, and treatment of child abuse and neglect;

(2) the term “child welfare workforce” means professional and paraprofessional personnel employed by, or affiliated with, a State in the fields of health care, medicine, law enforcement, judiciary, social work and child protection, education, child care, and other relevant fields, or individuals such as court appointed special advocates or guardian ad litem, who are engaged in, or intend to work in, the field of prevention, identification, and treatment of child abuse and neglect;

(3) the term “Indian Tribe” has the meaning given the term “Indian tribe” in section 4 of the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act (25 U.S.C. 450b);

(4) the term “secondary trauma” means the secondary traumatic stress or vicarious trauma that can occur when a professional experiences stress or
symptoms of trauma when working with children
and families who are experiencing abuse, neglect, or
family violence;

(5) the term “Secretary” means the Secretary
of Health and Human Services; and

(6) the term “State” has the meaning given
such term in section 3 of the Child Abuse Preven-
tion and Treatment Act (42 U.S.C. 5101 note).

SEC. 4. DEMONSTRATION PROGRAM.

(a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall conduct a 5-
year demonstration program under which the Secretary
awards, on a competitive basis, grants to eligible entities
to plan and implement activities to achieve the strategic
objectives described in subsection (d) with respect to the
child welfare workforce.

(b) ELIGIBLE ENTITIES.—To be eligible to receive a
grant under this section, an entity shall be a State or local
governmental agency, Indian Tribe or Tribal organization,
a nonprofit entity, or the lead entity administering a grant
to the applicable State or Indian Tribe under title II of
the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (42 U.S.C.
5116 et seq.).

(e) APPLICATIONS.—An eligible entity desiring a
grant under this section shall submit an application to the
Secretary at such time, in such manner, and containing
such information as the Secretary may require, including—

(1) a description of the strategic objectives described in subsection (d) that the eligible entity intends to strengthen the child welfare workforce;

(2) a description of the eligible entity and evidence of the eligible entity’s capacity to carry out activities to achieve the strategic objectives as described under paragraph (1);

(3) an analysis of child welfare workforce needs of the State, and barriers to recruitment and retention of such workforce, including the impact of caseloads, salaries, and workplace violence prevention plans on retention, and which may include consideration of any employee surveys on the organizational structure of relevant entities;

(4) a description of the current or prospective employees that will be targeted or recruited by the strategic objectives selected from subsection (d), including an analysis of the demographic characteristics of the child welfare workforce;

(5) a description of the activities the eligible entity intends to undertake to sustainable progress towards achieving such strategic objectives;
(6) a description of the performance measures the eligible entity intends to use to measure progress towards achieving such strategic objectives;

(7) a description of the eligible entity’s pre-service training and continuum of support that such entity intends to use for the child welfare workforce, including professionalization of the supervisory workforce;

(8) a description of the Federal and non-Federal resources, available under provisions of law other than this section and the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (42 U.S.C. 5101 et seq.), that will be leveraged in support of the activities under the grant;

(9) a timeline for implementing and making progress towards achieving such strategic objectives, and assurances that the eligible entity will provide periodic reports to the Secretary on such progress, as the Secretary may require; and

(10) an identification of technology infrastructure updates the eligible entity intends to employ in order to improve case worker support.

(d) Strategic Objectives.—The activities to be carried out under each grant awarded under this section shall be designed to achieve strategic objectives that—
(1) include—

(A) analysis of the child welfare workforce needs in the applicable State, in order to reduce barriers to recruitment, development, and retention of such workforce, which may include conducting a time study to determine how the child welfare workforce allocated working hours toward required work activities;

(B) planning for the recruitment, hiring, and pre-service training of prospective caseworkers and other members of the child welfare workforce, utilizing evidence-based, evidence-informed, or other promising practices;

(C) planning for ongoing professional development opportunities and continuum of support to improve retention of child welfare workforce; and

(D) consideration of best practices to meet the unique needs and development of infants, children, and youth, including such individuals with disabilities and children under age of 3; and

(2) may include updating technology infrastructure in child welfare work systems and data sharing across child-serving systems.
(c) Award Requirements.—

(1) Duration.—Each grant awarded under this section shall be for a period not to exceed 5 years, subject to the availability of funds.

(2) Amount.—Each grant awarded under this section shall be in amount that is not more than $100,000 per year for the duration of the grant period. An eligible entity receiving a grant under this section may allocate not more than 5 percent of the funds awarded through a grant under this section to administrative expenses.

(3) Allocation of Awards.—The Secretary shall award up to 10 grants to States or counties and up to 3 grants to Indian Tribes, and shall ensure that grantees are regionally diverse and serve both rural and urban populations.

(4) Priority.—In awarding grants under this section, the Secretary shall give priority to eligible entities that have high rates of child welfare workforce turnover.

(f) Demonstration Project Activities.—

(1) Required Activities.—To achieve the strategic objectives identified in an eligible entity’s application under subsection (c)(3), each eligible entity receiving a grant under this section shall carry
out the following activities, in a manner that inte-
grates services and funding sources to ensure effec-
tiveness of the activities and that uses the grant
funds efficiently:

(A) Recruitment and hiring ef-
forts.—The eligible entity shall provide serv-
ices to expand awareness of, interest in, and
preparation for, careers in the child welfare
workforce, which—

(i) shall include prioritizing recruit-
ment of nontraditional candidates (such as
older workers transitioning from other
fields or reentering the workforce after
raising families; candidates whose race,
ethnicity, and language capacity are reflec-
tive of communities they will be serving; or
students); and

(ii) may include—

(I) updating child welfare work-
force marketing and recruitment ma-
terials;

(II) developing partnerships be-
tween the State and institutions of
higher education to implement train-
ing programs specific to the needs of
9 the child welfare workforce of the
State;

(III) providing internship and job
shadowing opportunities for individ-
uals considering careers in the child
welfare workforce;

(IV) developing a competency-
based recruitment, screening, and se-
lection process that may include com-
pletion of realistic caseworker exer-
cises;

(V) developing and using simula-
tion activities to share with potential
new caseworkers during the applica-
tion process;

(VI) creating materials depicting
real job experiences and interactions
with clients, emphasizing the direct
impact that caseworker turnover has
on children; and

(VII) developing publicly avail-
able career opportunity hub and offer
position matching services.

(B) SUPPORT SERVICES.—The eligible en-
tity shall provide services to support the success
of individuals employed by a child welfare agency, which shall include the following:

(i) **Early Employment Services.**—

Services provided to such individuals who are in their first 6 months of employment in the child welfare workforce, to ensure that such individuals succeed in such careers, including—

(I) mentoring from colleague with 2 or more years of child welfare work experience and may include compensation for mentors;

(II) phased training and orientation over initial 6 months of employment, including explicit training related to identifying traumatic stress and secondary traumatic stress and support resources available to employees;

(III) joint field visits with experienced child welfare worker; and

(IV) low-risk initial caseload assignment with gradual increase in caseload size and difficulty.
(ii) EMPLOYMENT SERVICES.—Services to ensure that such individuals employed by the State for more than 6 months have access to ongoing professional development and support to increase job sustainability and long-term retention, which—

(I) shall include—

(aa) providing peer mentoring, a crisis helpline, and on-site crisis response to address traumatic stress and secondary traumatic stress for caseworkers;

(bb) providing support for supervisory personnel, including by conducting interviews, to assist employees in long-term career planning and discuss opportunities for advancement within the child welfare workforce;

(cc) developing best practices to address caseworker burnout and other areas known to increase turnover; and
(dd) providing a system of
career advancement with wage
progression and opportunities to
attain further education and pro-
fessional development; and

(II) may include—

(aa) creating additional posi-
tions to achieve manageable case-
loads that reflect industry stand-
ard standards such as coaches, mental
health specialists, substance
abuse specialists, homelessness
specialist, developmental dis-
ability specialists, and child psy-
chiatrists;

(bb) safety awareness train-
ing and supports in the field;

(cc) providing multi-modal
training opportunities (such as
eLearning, blended classroom,
video, webinar, and tools and job
aids); and

(dd) providing employee
wellness programs and edu-
cational leave.
(2) **Technology Infrastructure.**—In addition to the activities under paragraph (1), an eligible entity receiving a grant under this section may use such grant funds to identify and act upon opportunities for technology infrastructure updates to State systems to support the child welfare workforce, which may include—

(A) ensuring technological accessibility for child welfare workers and other systems serving children and families;

(B) equipping caseworkers with smart phones, tablets, or laptop computers;

(C) providing technology professional development;

(D) improving mobile and remote access capabilities for use of telehealth or similar services; and

(E) addressing other needs within States.

(g) **Evaluation and Progress Reports.**—Not later than 2 years after receiving a grant under this section, and annually thereafter until the grant period ends, each eligible entity shall submit a report to the Secretary and to the governor of the State in which the eligible entity serves, that describes—

(1) the activities funded by the grant; and
(2) the progress the eligible entity has made towards achieving the strategic objectives identified under subsection (d)(3).

(h) Administration by the Secretary.—

(1) In general.—The Secretary may use not more than 10 percent of the amount appropriated under subsection (i) for each fiscal year for administrative expenses to carry out this section, including the expenses of providing the technical assistance and oversight activities under paragraph (2).

(2) Technical assistance; oversight.—The Secretary shall provide technical assistance and oversight to assist eligible entities in applying for grants under this section and carrying out programs using grants awarded under this section.

(3) Evaluation and report.—

(A) In general.—The Secretary shall conduct an evaluation of each grant awarded under this section and submit to Congress a report on such evaluation to Congress. Such report shall—

(i) examine the results of the recruitment and retention initiatives supported by the States on the outcomes of the activities under subsection (f); and
(ii) be completed not later than 180 days after the date on which the Secretary receives the report under subsection (g) from an eligible entity.

(B) DATA.—Recipients of grants under this section shall submit to the Secretary any data the Secretary may require for the evaluation and report under this paragraph.

(i) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There are authorized to be appropriated such sums as may be necessary to carry out this section.