

119TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

S. _____

To amend the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act to establish a career pathways grant program.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

Ms. HASSAN (for herself, Mr. YOUNG, Ms. COLLINS, and Mr. KAINÉ) introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on _____

A BILL

To amend the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act to establish a career pathways grant program.

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 “Gateway to Careers
5 Act of 2026”.

6 **SEC. 2. CAREER PATHWAYS GRANT PROGRAM.**

7 (a) IN GENERAL.—Subtitle D of title I of the Work-
8 force Innovation and Opportunity Act (29 U.S.C. 3221 et
9 seq.) is amended by adding at the end the following:

1 **“SEC. 173. CAREER PATHWAYS GRANT PROGRAM.**

2 “(a) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

3 “(1) CAREER PATHWAY PARTNERSHIP APPLI-
4 CANT.—

5 “(A) IN GENERAL.—The term ‘career
6 pathway partnership applicant’ means a part-
7 nership that includes—

8 “(i) a workforce development partner;

9 “(ii) an education partner; and

10 “(iii) an employer partner.

11 “(B) WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT PART-
12 NER.—A workforce development partner de-
13 scribed in subparagraph (A) means one or more
14 of the following:

15 “(i) A State board or a local board.

16 “(ii) An industry association or other
17 representative of multiple employers in the
18 target industry, including an eligible indus-
19 try or sector partnership.

20 “(iii) A community-based organization
21 with experience in providing employment,
22 education, or support services relevant to
23 the career pathway and student popu-
24 lations receiving services under the grant
25 under this section.

1 “(iv) Another State entity with experi-
2 ence transitioning individuals into the
3 workforce (including through a community
4 rehabilitation program (as defined in sec-
5 tion 7 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973
6 (29 U.S.C. 705))), such as a State com-
7 prehensive rehabilitation center.

8 “(C) EDUCATION PARTNER.—An education
9 partner described in subparagraph (A) means
10 one or more of the following:

11 “(i) An institution of higher edu-
12 cation, as defined in section 101 of the
13 Higher Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C.
14 1001), or a postsecondary vocational insti-
15 tution, as defined in section 102(c) of such
16 Act (20 U.S.C. 1002(c)).

17 “(ii) An area career and technical
18 education school that provides education at
19 the postsecondary level.

20 “(iii) A local educational agency, as
21 defined under section 8101 of the Elemen-
22 tary and Secondary Education Act of 1965
23 (20 U.S.C. 7801).

24 “(iv) An eligible provider, as defined
25 under section 203.

1 “(D) EMPLOYER PARTNER.—An employer
2 partner described in subparagraph (A) means a
3 representative of multiple businesses or other
4 employers in the career pathways field, includ-
5 ing small and medium-sized employers.

6 “(2) ELIGIBLE INDUSTRY OR SECTOR PART-
7 NERSHIP.—The term ‘eligible industry or sector
8 partnership’ means—

9 “(A) an industry or sector partnership,
10 which shall, at a minimum, include multiple
11 representatives described in each of clauses (i)
12 through (iii) of paragraph (26)(A) of section 3;
13 or

14 “(B) a partnership, of multiple entities de-
15 scribed in section 3(26) and a State board or
16 local board, that is in the process of estab-
17 lishing an industry or sector partnership.

18 “(3) MEASURABLE SKILL GAINS.—The term
19 ‘measurable skill gains’ has the meaning given the
20 term in section 361.155(a)(1)(v) of title 34, Code of
21 Federal Regulations (or successor regulations).

22 “(4) SECRETARY.—The term ‘Secretary’ means
23 the Secretary of Labor.

24 “(5) UNIVERSAL DESIGN FOR LEARNING.—The
25 term ‘universal design for learning’ has the meaning

1 given the term in section 103 of the Higher Edu-
2 cation Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1003).

3 “(b) PROGRAM ESTABLISHED.—

4 “(1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary, in consulta-
5 tion with the Secretary of Education, shall establish
6 a career pathway grant program, through which the
7 Secretary shall award grants, on a competitive basis,
8 to State workforce agencies to enable the State
9 workforce agencies to award subgrants to career
10 pathway partnership applicants to carry out the ac-
11 tivities described in subsection (e).

12 “(2) GRANT AWARDS TO CAREER PATHWAY
13 PARTNERSHIP APPLICANTS.—In the case of a State
14 in which the State workforce agency does not apply
15 for a grant under this section, the Secretary may
16 award a grant to a career pathway partnership ap-
17 plicant to carry out the activities described in sub-
18 section (e) in such State.

19 “(c) APPLICATION FOR GRANTS.—A State workforce
20 agency that desires to receive a grant under this section
21 shall submit an application to the Secretary at such time
22 and in such manner as the Secretary may require.

23 “(d) GEOGRAPHIC EQUITY.—In awarding grants
24 under this section, the Secretary shall ensure an equitable
25 geographic distribution of such grants, including to rural

1 areas and other regions that have traditionally been un-
2 derserved by regional economic development and industry
3 or sector partnership activities.

4 “(e) SUBGRANTS TO CAREER PATHWAY PARTNER-
5 SHIP APPLICANTS AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE.—

6 “(1) IN GENERAL.—A State workforce agency
7 that receives a grant under this section shall use the
8 grant funds—

9 “(A) to award subgrants to career pathway
10 partnership applicants; and

11 “(B) to provide technical assistance in ap-
12 plying for subgrants under this section to eligi-
13 ble career pathway partnership applicants.

14 “(2) APPLICATIONS.—A career pathway part-
15 nership applicant desiring to receive a subgrant
16 under this section shall submit an application to the
17 State workforce agency, at such time and in such
18 manner as the State workforce agency may require.
19 Such application shall include the following informa-
20 tion:

21 “(A) A description of the career pathway
22 program that will be supported under the
23 subgrant, including a description of the in-de-
24 mand industry sectors or occupations that will
25 be targeted and the industry-recognized creden-

1 tials or other recognized postsecondary creden-
2 tials to be awarded.

3 “(B) A description of how the career path-
4 way program supported under the subgrant is
5 aligned and coordinated with other employment,
6 education, and support services offered in the
7 geographic area served under the subgrant, in-
8 cluding those provided under this Act, the
9 Higher Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1001
10 et seq.), the Carl D. Perkins Career and Tech-
11 nical Education Act of 2006 (20 U.S.C. 2301
12 et seq.), the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (29
13 U.S.C. 701 et seq.), the supplemental nutrition
14 assistance program established under the Food
15 and Nutrition Act of 2008 (7 U.S.C. 2011 et
16 seq.), and the program of block grants to States
17 for temporary assistance for needy families
18 under part A of title IV of the Social Security
19 Act (42 U.S.C. 601 et seq.).

20 “(C) A description of the populations that
21 will be served under the subgrant, including an
22 analysis of any barriers to employment, such as
23 supportive services, including in postsecondary
24 education, access, and completion, that such
25 populations face, and an analysis of how the

1 services to be provided under the subgrant will
2 address those barriers.

3 “(D) A description of the activities and
4 services to be provided under this subgrant,
5 consistent with paragraph (4).

6 “(E) A description of the performance out-
7 comes that the career pathway partnership ap-
8 plicant plans to achieve, including a description
9 of how the career pathway partnership appli-
10 cant will evaluate and measure student progress
11 and measurable skill gains along a career path-
12 way.

13 “(F) Such other information as the State
14 workforce agency may require.

15 “(3) PRIORITY.—In awarding subgrants under
16 this subsection, the State workforce agency shall—

17 “(A) give priority to career pathway part-
18 nership applicants that include as a partner in
19 the partnership a public institution of higher
20 education at which the highest degree that is
21 predominantly awarded to students is an associ-
22 ate’s degree, including 2-year Tribal Colleges or
23 Universities under section 316 of the Higher
24 Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1059e), pub-
25 lic 2-year State institutions of higher education,

1 and the campuses of 4-year public institutions
2 of higher education at which the highest degree
3 that is predominantly awarded to students in
4 an associate’s degree;

5 “(B) give priority to career pathway part-
6 nership applicants that seek to serve individuals
7 with a barrier to employment or individuals
8 with a barrier to postsecondary education; and

9 “(C) give priority to career pathway part-
10 nership applicants that will use subgrant funds
11 for an activity, strategy, or intervention that—

12 “(i) demonstrates, using evidence-
13 based data, improving student outcomes or
14 other relevant outcomes based on—

15 “(I) strong evidence from not
16 less than 1 well-designed and well-im-
17 plemented experimental study;

18 “(II) moderate evidence from not
19 less than 1 well-designed and well-im-
20 plemented quasi-experimental study;
21 or

22 “(III) promising evidence from
23 not less than 1 well-designed and well-
24 implemented correlational study with
25 statistical controls for selection bias;

1 “(ii) demonstrates a rationale based
2 on high quality research finding or positive
3 evaluation that such activity, strategy, or
4 intervention is likely to improve student
5 outcomes or other relevant outcomes; and

6 “(iii) includes ongoing efforts to ex-
7 amine the effects of such activity, strategy,
8 or intervention.

9 “(4) USE OF FUNDS.—

10 “(A) DEVELOPING AND IMPLEMENTING
11 CAREER PATHWAY PROGRAMS.—A career path-
12 way partnership applicant that receives a
13 subgrant under this subsection shall use the
14 subgrant funds to carry out activities that sup-
15 port the development and implementation of a
16 career pathway program, which shall include
17 one or more of the following:

18 “(i) The planning and implementation
19 of agreements between the partners of the
20 career pathway partnership applicant to
21 support seamless transitions between ele-
22 ments of the career pathway program of-
23 fered by different partners, as appropriate.

24 “(ii) The development and expansion
25 of new or existing programs at the career

1 pathway partnership applicant that utilize
2 integrated education and training strate-
3 gies, and support multiple entry and exit
4 points for working learners, which may in-
5 clude—

6 “(I) dual-enrollment approaches
7 for secondary students or discon-
8 nected youth seeking to participate in
9 a career pathway program;

10 “(II) strategies that help working
11 students and other nontraditional and
12 adult student populations access skills
13 and recognized credentials; and

14 “(III) strategies that incorporate
15 the principles of universal design for
16 learning and other evidence-based
17 practices known to support individuals
18 with disabilities.

19 “(iii) The provision of evidence-based
20 professional development for faculty and
21 other staff at the career pathway partner-
22 ship applicant, which may incorporate the
23 principles of universal design for learning,
24 as appropriate.

1 “(iv) The acquisition of equipment
2 necessary to support the delivery of career
3 pathway programs supported through the
4 subgrant, and minor alterations to support
5 the use of the equipment.

6 “(v) Any other evidence-based activi-
7 ties identified by the career pathway part-
8 nership applicant as necessary to support
9 the development or implementation of ca-
10 reer pathway programs, as long as such
11 activities are clearly outlined in the
12 subgrant application.

13 “(B) STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES.—In
14 addition to the activities described in subpara-
15 graph (A), a career pathway partnership appli-
16 cant receiving a subgrant under this subsection
17 shall use subgrant funds to provide student
18 support services to students engaged in career
19 pathway programs to enable career pathway
20 program participation and completion, which
21 may include—

22 “(i) the provision of direct support
23 services such as childcare, transportation,
24 mental health and substance use disorder
25 treatment, assistance in obtaining health

1 insurance coverage, and assistance in ac-
2 cessing the supplemental nutrition assist-
3 ance program established under the Food
4 and Nutrition Act of 2008 (7 U.S.C. 2011
5 et seq.), the special supplemental nutrition
6 program for women, infants, and children
7 established by section 17 of the Child Nu-
8 trition Act of 1966 (42 U.S.C. 1786),
9 housing, and other benefits, as appro-
10 priate;

11 “(ii) offering career pathway naviga-
12 tion and case management services, includ-
13 ing providing information and outreach to
14 target populations to encourage individuals
15 to take part in programs and service offer-
16 ings; and

17 “(iii) the provision of emergency
18 grants to help students facing financial
19 hardships that may impact enrollment or
20 completion of an element of a career path-
21 way program.

22 “(5) REPORTS.—

23 “(A) REPORT TO THE SECRETARY.—Each
24 State workforce agency receiving a grant under

1 this section shall submit a report to the Sec-
2 retary, on an annual basis, describing—

3 “(i) the activities provided under the
4 subgrants awarded under this section, in-
5 cluding activities carried out directly by ca-
6 reer pathway partnership applicants;

7 “(ii) the students receiving services
8 under the subgrants, disaggregated by age,
9 race or ethnicity, gender, barriers to em-
10 ployment, and income;

11 “(iii) the quality of jobs in which stu-
12 dents receiving services through a career
13 pathway program carried out through sub-
14 grants under this section are employed
15 after exit from the program; and

16 “(iv) indicators of performance for
17 students receiving services through a ca-
18 reer pathway program carried out through
19 subgrants under this section, disaggregated
20 by participant type as described in clause
21 (ii), including, at a minimum—

22 “(I) the percentage of program
23 participants who are in unsubsidized
24 employment prior to enrollment in the
25 career pathway program;

1 “(II) the percentage of program
2 participants who are in unsubsidized
3 employment during the second quarter
4 after exit from the program;

5 “(III) the percentage of program
6 participants who are in unsubsidized
7 employment during the fourth quarter
8 after exit from the program;

9 “(IV) the median earnings of
10 program participants who are in un-
11 subsidized employment prior to enroll-
12 ment in the career pathway program;

13 “(V) the median earnings of pro-
14 gram participants who are in unsub-
15 sidized employment during the second
16 quarter after exit from the program;

17 “(VI) the percentage of program
18 participants who obtain a recognized
19 postsecondary credential, or a sec-
20 ondary school diploma or its recog-
21 nized equivalent, during participation
22 in or within 1 year after exit from the
23 program;

24 “(VII) the percentage of program
25 participants who, during a program

1 year, are in an education or training
2 program that leads to a recognized
3 postsecondary credential or employ-
4 ment and who are achieving measur-
5 able skill gains toward such a creden-
6 tial or employment; and

7 “(VIII) the percentage of pro-
8 gram participants receiving support
9 services, disaggregated by type of
10 service.

11 “(B) REPORT TO CONGRESS.—The Sec-
12 retary shall submit a report to Congress, on a
13 biennial basis, on the information submitted to
14 the Secretary under subparagraph (A).

15 “(f) DURATION OF AWARDS.—Each grant and
16 subgrant awarded under this section shall be for a period
17 of not more than 4 years. A career pathway partnership
18 applicant may apply for subsequent subgrants after the
19 completion of a subgrant period.

20 “(g) EVALUATION AND ADMINISTRATION.—The Sec-
21 retary shall reserve—

22 “(1) not less than 1 percent and not more than
23 3 percent of the funds made available under sub-
24 section (h) for each fiscal year to—

1 “(A) conduct a rigorous, independent eval-
2 uation of the activities funded under this sec-
3 tion; and

4 “(B) disseminate and promote the utiliza-
5 tion of evidence-based practices related to ca-
6 reer pathway programs for postsecondary stu-
7 dents; and

8 “(2) not more than 3 percent of the funds
9 made available under subsection (h) for each fiscal
10 year for administrative costs associated in carrying
11 out this section.

12 “(h) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There
13 are authorized to be appropriated to carry out the activi-
14 ties described in this section, such sums as may be nec-
15 essary for fiscal year 2027 and for each subsequent fiscal
16 year thereafter.”.

17 (b) TABLE OF CONTENTS.—The table of contents in
18 section 1(b) of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity
19 Act is amended by inserting after the item relating to sec-
20 tion 172, the following:

“Sec. 173. Career pathways grant program.”.