

Farm, Food, and National Security Act of 2024

On May 17, Chairman of the House Agriculture Committee, Representative G.T. Thompson (R-PA) released a discussion draft of their 2024 Farm Bill, the [Farm, Food, and National Security Act](#).

Please find a section-by-section summary [here](#). NRHA's Farm Bill priorities can be found [here](#). If you have any questions, contact Alexa McKinley (amckinley@ruralhealth.us).

Key provisions are highlighted below. All programs are reauthorized for a period of 5 years.

Title VI: Rural Development.

Two rural provider wins that NRHA advocated for are included in this discussion draft.

First, language based on [H.R. 4713](#), the Rural Hospital Technical Assistance Program Act, is included in the discussion draft. This provision would continue the activities of the existing Rural Hospital Technical Assistance Program at USDA and broaden the program to become the **Rural Health Care Facilities Technical Assistance Program**. Eligible entities are hospitals, critical access hospitals, rural emergency hospitals, rural health clinics, community health centers, home health agencies, and psychiatric hospitals. The Program helps rural facilities prevent closure, strengthen essential health care services, and improve financial performance. Priority for eligible facilities would be given to borrowers and grantees of the Rural Housing Service, Rural Business-Cooperative Service, and Rural Utilities Service. The program is authorized at \$2 million per year.

Second, concepts from [H.R. 5989](#), the **Rural Health Care Facilities Revitalization Act**, are included as well. This would provide eligible health care facilities the opportunity to refinance debt obligations upon agreeing to undergo financial and managerial planning aimed at improving long-term viability.

The ReConnect Program is integrated into the Farm Bill Broadband Program to create **the ReConnect Rural Broadband Program**. NRHA recommended this in our [Farm Bill letter](#) to House and Senate Agriculture Committee leadership. This bill would raise minimum eligibility speeds to 50/25 Mbps. To qualify for a loan, 75% of the proposed service area must lack 50/25 Mbps and to qualify for a grant, 90% of the proposed service area must lack 50/25 Mbps. In addition, highest priority would be given to unserved rural areas that have less than 25/3 Mbps connectivity. Many concepts from NRHA-endorsed [H.R. 4227](#), the ReConnecting Rural America Act, were adopted in this proposal.

The **Community Connect Grant Program** is reauthorized at \$50 million per year. Community connect provides grants for the construction of retail broadband networks used to furnish free internet at participating community facilities and other free access points.

The **Distance Learning and Telemedicine (DLT) Program** is reauthorized at \$82 million per year. This provision is based on language in NRHA-endorsed [H.R. 5308](#), the Rural Telehealth and Education Enhancement Act.

In order to help entities apply for broadband loans and grants, this bill creates the **Broadband Technical Assistance Program**. Eligible entities are tribes, state or local governments, U.S. territories, universities, nonprofit organizations, corporations, LLCs, and LLPs.

The 20% set-aside in the DLT Program and prioritization in the Community Facilities Loan and Grant (CFL) Program for projects that offer substance use disorder are extended. The bill also adds a 20% set-aside in DLT and prioritization in CFL for "mental health, behavioral health, and maternal health

treatment services.” This section includes concepts from NRHA-supported [H.R. 4603](#), the Rural Wellness Act.

The legislation incorporates NRHA-endorsed childcare solutions from [H.R. 3922](#), the **Expanding Childcare in Rural America Act**. USDA would create a 3-year childcare initiative across the Department to prioritize projects that address the availability, quality, and cost of childcare through multiple Rural Development programs, including CFL.

The Rural Innovation Stronger Economy (RISE) Grant Program is reauthorized. This program offers flexible grant funding for rural areas to maximize job opportunities and support private investment in regional economies. [H.R. 7015](#), supported by NRHA, is incorporated into this section to **provide funding for career pathway programs and sector partnerships in various industries including health care and childcare**.

Nutrition.

The legislation includes several new SNAP provisions:

- The Elderly Simplified Application Project is codified. This streamlines SNAP access for households that do not have earned income and in which all adult members are over 60 years old or have a disability.
- USDA must contract with the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine to study the efficacy of allowing hot foods to be purchased with SNAP dollars. NRHA has advocated for this commonsense policy change.
- USDA must submit a report to Congress on food security and diet quality in the U.S. for both SNAP participants and non-participants.
- A declaration that SNAP allows low-income households to afford food for an active, healthy lifestyle and such assistance should be designed to prevent diet-related chronic diseases.

The **Seniors Farmers’ Market Nutrition Program** is reauthorized at an increased funding level of \$22.6 million per year. The **Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program** (GusNIP) is similarly reauthorized at the higher funding level of \$75 million per year. This is an almost \$20 million increase over the 2018 Farm Bill authorized amount. By September 2029, USDA will no longer have authority to carry out the produce prescription program established under GusNIP, and it must, in collaboration with the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), create a plan to transition GusNIP to HHS. The **Healthy Food Financing Initiative** is also reauthorized at \$135 million per year, \$10 million above the 2018 Farm Bill.

Title VII: Research, Extension, and Related Matters

The **Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Network** (FRSAN) is reauthorized with new improvements pulled from [H.R. 5246](#), the National Agricultural Crisis Hotline Act, and [H.R. 6379](#), the Farmers First Act. FRSAN grant recipients would be encouraged to make referrals to rural health clinics, critical access hospitals, certified community behavioral health clinics, and federally qualified health centers. Additionally, new language clarifies that grant awards may be used to provide behavioral health counseling and other assistance through crisis hotlines. NRHA is disappointed to see that increased funding from the Farmers First Act is not included.

Additionally, the Rural Health Liaison is ordered to coordinate with USDA in implementing FRSAN and submit a report to Congress on their activities in this area.