

The HOPE Act of 2021

Congressman Joe Morelle (NY25) & Senator Kirsten Gillibrand (NY)

Endorsed by: Hunger Free America, Progressive Policy Institute

Background: The erosion of the middle class, high poverty, hunger, and homelessness, and the steep decline of the American dream are among the most important domestic challenges of our times. In 2018, according to the Bureau of the Census, 37 million individuals—including more than 11 million children—lived below the Federal poverty line. Many low-income individuals living in poverty—the majority of whom are working people, children, seniors, and individuals with disabilities—are unaware of the government benefits for which they are eligible. Furthermore, we regularly see that qualified individuals miss out on critical benefits as a result of misinformation, time consuming procedures, and repetitive and discouraging application process. In 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic, food insecurity in the United States soared, with the Census Household Pulse Survey finding that at least 22 percent of Americans, and 28 percent of children in the United States, suffered from food insecurity.

Applicants who are eligible for Federal government benefits are often required to travel significant distances to multiple agencies' government offices, preparing and submitting piles of nearly identical paperwork at each location, and typically waiting in long lines during inconvenient times. As a result of these barriers, many eligible individuals miss out on critical benefits that could help lift their families out of poverty.

The Health, Opportunity, and Personal Empowerment (HOPE) Act would use pilot projects to test concrete methods to enable economically challenged Americans to more easily communicate and coordinate with government and nonprofit agencies to boost their long-term economic advancement. By leveraging client-facing technology, these pilot programs aim to empower low-income individuals and households to take control of the benefits they deserve right through the phone in their hands. The bill will allow low-income individuals and households to voluntarily work to create and achieve personal plans that ensure economic stability and growth.

Bill Summary:

1. Authorize three federal agencies—HUD, USDA, and HHS—to enable select state, county, city, and tribal governments to create pilot programs in economically distressed rural, urban, and suburban areas as well as state-wide.
2. Leverage client-facing technology to coordinate access to multiple government agencies that work on anti-poverty, health care, nutrition, housing, work support programs, and nonprofit aid for low-income Americans.
3. Establish voluntary accounts that empower low-income families to easily access and monitor—within one central online account—the status, summary, and recertification deadlines for all their benefits and savings.
4. Establish a merit-based competition to award HOPE Technology Innovation Contracts that help ensure client-facing technology apps, widgets, and templates are created for pilot entities to use to create meaningful HOPE Accounts.

For more information, or to add your boss as a cosponsor, please contact Owen Reilly (Morelle) at Owen.Reilly@mail.house.gov or Dominic Sanchez (Gillibrand) at Dominic_Sanchez@gillibrand.senate.gov.