Title: To require the Secretary of Agriculture to establish a forest climate workforce incubator

program, and for other purposes.

*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 “Forest Climate Workforce Act of 2021”.

SECTION 2. FINDINGS.

Congress finds that –

1. Across the United States, there are dramatic disparities in tree canopy, with inequities along socio-economic and racial lines. Typically, low-income communities and historically underserved communities have inadequate tree canopy coverage and limited access to green space in comparison to more affluent communities.
2. Tree canopy in many urban cities is decreasing due to extreme weather, pests, poor tree maintenance, and a variety of other stressors.
3. Lack of tree cover exacerbates the effects of urban heat islands, where paved surfaces, large structures, and the lack of natural landscapes cause urbanized areas to become warmer than outlying areas.
4. Research has shown that lack of tree cover can impact academic performance, crime rates, and public health, including increased respiratory and cardiovascular illness and death from extreme heat and poor air quality.
5. Equitable distribution of tree canopy will give more Americans access to the benefits of healthy urban forests.
6. Increased urban forest and tree canopy can have multiple benefits to our climate, public health, economy, and infrastructure, including sequestering millions of metric tons of carbon dioxide; improving air quality and public health, including dramatically reducing respiratory illness, prevalence of type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, and mental health disorders; reduce energy demands and save American cities billions of dollars annually in energy costs; manage stormwater; and help foster healthy and local green economies. These benefits can be felt by all communities.
7. Healthy tree canopy requires maintaining existing urban trees, as well as giving adequate care to newly planted trees to ensure they reach maturity. Mature trees sequester more carbon than younger trees and provide more direct filtration capacity.
8. Restoring access to healthy canopy coverage in underserved communities requires a skilled workforce, yet all parts of the United States forest sector have workforce shortages, including urban and rural tree planting and tree-care positions.
9. Investing in workforce development will help secure a long-term, stable forestry workforce.

SEC. 3. FOREST CLIMATE WORKFORCE INCUBATOR PROGRAM.

(a) Definitions.—In this section:

(1) AT-RISK POPULATION.—The term “at-risk population” includes—

(A) individuals at least 18 years old who have been unemployed for at least 90 days;

(B) individuals 18 to 24 years old who are unemployed and not enrolled in any educational program;

(C) veterans (as defined in section 101 of title 38, United States Code), who were discharged or released from service at least 90 days ago;

(D) individuals who served a term of imprisonment and were released from custody at least 90 days ago;

(E) individuals who have completed a State-licensed drug rehabilitation program;

(F) individuals who are underemployed or unemployed as a result of the COVID-19

national emergency;

(G) individuals earning an annual income at or near the federal poverty line; and

(H) historically underserved communities, including communities of color, Tribal and indigenous communities, and other disadvantaged communities.

(2) ELIGIBLE ENTITY.—The term “eligible entity” means—

(A) an organization providing a preemployment program—

(i) not less than 50 percent of the individuals served by which are from an at-risk population; and

(ii) that places not less than 50 percent of program participants in the forest

climate workforce; and

(B) an organization providing wrap-around services for individuals from at-risk populations to support the successful participation of those individuals in the forest

climate workforce.

(3) FOREST CLIMATE WORKFORCE.—The term “forest climate workforce” means individuals engaged in careers in the forest sector that benefit the mitigation of greenhouse

gas emissions, including—

(A) urban tree planting and tree maintenance;

(B) forest management and restoration;

(C) urban wood reuse;

(D) tree nurseries; and

(E) careers related to the careers described in subparagraphs (A) and (D).

(4) PREEMPLOYMENT PROGRAM.—The term “preemployment program” includes—

(A) a pre-apprenticeship or other related training program designed to facilitate entry into a paid apprenticeship or full-time employment in the forest sector;

(B) support services for unemployed individuals designed to build readiness for engagement and increased retention in a training program; and

(C) part-time and entry-level employment specifically designed to prepare a participant to obtain credentials required by employers in the forest sector and to transition into full-time and permanent employment.

(5) PROGRAM.—The term “program” means the program established under subsection (b).

(6) SECRETARY.—The term “Secretary” means the Secretary of Agriculture, acting through—

(A) the rural development mission area; and

(B) the State and private forestry deputy area of the Forest Service.

(7) WRAP-AROUND SERVICES.—The term “wrap-around services” means support services for individuals receiving job training or who have recently entered into full-time employment, including transportation, mentorship, career coaching, and childcare.

(b) Establishment.—The Secretary shall establish a program to facilitate the development of a robust forest climate workforce and address long-term unemployment and underemployment by—

(1) providing technical assistance to sustain and incubate public and private sector entities that facilitate the entry of individuals from at-risk populations into the forest climate workforce; and

(2) awarding grants under subsection (e).

(c) Collaboration.—In carrying out the program, the Secretary shall obtain input and guidance from, and collaborate with—

(1) forest restoration companies, including companies engaged in wildfire risk reduction, agroforestry, and recovery through forestry;

(2) tree planting and tree maintenance companies, including companies engaged in urban forestry and reforestation;

(3) local parks organizations;

(4) community organizations that work with at-risk populations;

(5) institutions of higher education, including historically Black colleges and universities, Hispanic-serving institutions, Tribal colleges and universities, women’s colleges, and other colleges and universities at which a majority of the students are members of minority populations; and

(6) nongovernmental organizations with expertise in forestry, tree equity, affordable housing, and biological diversity.

(d) Education, Training, and Technical Assistance.— The Secretary shall provide educational materials, training, and technical assistance to units of local government, private companies, trade and technical schools, nongovernmental organizations, and other entities that provide or engage with preemployment programs or wrap-around services for individuals from at-risk populations entering into or participating in the forest climate workforce.

(e) Grants.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—After obtaining input and guidance from the entities described in subsection (c), the Secretary shall award grants on a competitive basis to eligible entities that the Secretary determines have the ability to expand capacity and increase the effectiveness of recruitment, training, entry, and retention of individuals from at-risk populations in the forest climate workforce, including—

(A) eligible entities with existing programs that seek to expand service to a greater number of individuals;

(B) eligible entities with existing programs that seek to carry out new initiatives or programming designed to improve outcomes; and

(C) eligible entities that are established on or after the date of enactment of this Act for purposes consistent with this section.

(2) DURATION.—An eligible entity may receive funding under paragraph (1) for a maximum of 10 years.

(3) LIMITATION. - Grants provided to individual eligible entities under this section shall not exceed $500,000 annually per entity.

(f) Priorities.—In carrying out the program, the Secretary shall give priority to projects and activities that—

(1) serve populations at the greatest demonstrated risk of long-term unemployment or underemployment;

(2) have demonstrated a relationship or have a commitment to developing relationships with communities where tree planting will occur;

(3) improve on existing programming and services in ways that can be replicated by other individuals or entities; or

(4) address unmet forest climate workforce demand from employers, as demonstrated by vacant positions, low retention rates, and other related measures.

(g) Authorization of Appropriations.—There are authorized to be appropriated such sums as are necessary to carry out this section.