118TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

S.

To establish the Office of Social Connection Policy, to establish a national strategy on social connection, and for other purposes.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

Mr. Murphy introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on ____________________

A BILL

To establish the Office of Social Connection Policy, to establish a national strategy on social connection, 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 “National Strategy for Social Connection Act”.

SEC. 2. FINDINGS.

Congress finds the following:

(1) The health of the Nation is rightly measured not only by its aggregate wealth or global power, but more centrally by its shared vision and
the bonds of connection that knit its people into a community.

(2) The fraying of the social fabric is directly implicated in the growth of loneliness, decline of civic and religious participation, the disintegration of communities, rising economic inequality and precarity, falling economic mobility, rising rates of depression, anxiety and addiction, diminishing health and life expectancy and rising levels of polarization and radicalization.

(3) These changes affect all people of the United States, but fall with particular force on the poor and marginalized, on children and adolescents, on individuals residing in economically disadvantaged regions, on veterans and on the elderly, and individuals without a college degree.


(5) According to the Surgeon General, social isolation and loneliness pose a significant risk to individual health and longevity, including a 29 percent increased risk of heart disease, a 32 percent increased risk of stroke, and for older adults, a 50 percent increased risk of developing dementia.
(6) Loneliness and social isolation increase the risk for premature death by 26 percent and 29 percent, respectively.

(7) The general flourishing, economic health and stability of the United States, and the effective functioning of government and society require renewed attention to social connection at every level of society, from individual and family, to local community and Nation.

(8) The causal connections between these changes are complex, and thus the various cultural, technological, demographic, economic, political and institutional drivers of social connection require attention from a dedicated expert body that may develop and share knowledge to incorporate into the national decision making process and align relevant agency actions.

(9) Federal funding for research and policy around social connection represents an investment in the future that is indispensable to sustained national progress and human flourishing, and there should be continuing national investment in identifying and expanding proven local strategies, assessing how agencies are or are not contributing to social connection,
and funding incentives to drive improvement commensurate with addressing contemporary problems.

SEC. 3. OFFICE OF SOCIAL CONNECTION POLICY; NATIONAL STRATEGY ON SOCIAL CONNECTION.

(a) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

(1) ADVISORY COUNCIL.—The term “Advisory Council” means the advisory council established under subsection (c)(1).

(2) DIRECTOR.—The term “Director” means the Director of the Office.

(3) INADEQUATE.—The term “inadequate”, with respect to loneliness, means the discrepancy or unmet need between an individual’s or community’s preferred and actual experience.

(4) LONELINESS.—The term “loneliness”, with respect to an individual, means a subjective distressing experience of an individual that results from perceived isolation or inadequate meaningful connection.

(5) OFFICE.—The term “Office” means the Office of Social Connection Policy.

(6) SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS.—The term “social connectedness” means the degree to which an individual or community achieves and maintains social connection needs.
(7) **Social connection.**—The term “social connection” means a continuum of the size and diversity of an individual’s social network and roles, the functions such relationships and roles serve, and the positive or negative qualities of such relationships and roles.

(8) **Social disconnection.**—The term “social disconnection” means objective or subjective deficits in social connection, including deficits in social relationships and roles, the functions such relationships and roles serve, and the positive or negative qualities of such relationships and roles.

(9) **Social infrastructure.**—The term “social infrastructure” means the programs (such as volunteer organizations, sports groups, religious groups, and member associations), policies (such as public transportation, housing, and education), and physical elements (such as libraries, parks, green spaces, and playgrounds) of a community that support the development of social connection.

(10) **Social isolation.**—The term “social isolation”, with respect to an individual, means that the individual objectively has few social relationships, social roles, or group memberships and has infrequent social interaction.
(b) Office of Social Connection Policy.—

(1) In general.—There is established within the Executive Office of the President an office, to be known as the “Office of Social Connection Policy”.

(2) Purposes.—The purposes of the Office shall be to provide to the President independent, expert judgment and assistance on policy matters that require accurate assessments of social connection.

(3) Director.—

(A) In general.—The head of the Office shall be the Director, who shall be appointed by the President, by and with the advice and consent of the Senate.

(B) Compensation.—The Director shall be compensated at the rate provided for level IV of the Executive Schedule under section 5315 of title 5, United States Code.

(4) Associate Directors.—

(A) In general.—The President may appoint, by and with the advice and consent of the Senate, not more than 4 Associate Directors of the Office.

(B) Compensation.—An Associate Director appointed under subparagraph (A) shall be compensated at the rate provided for level V of
the Executive Schedule under section 5316 of title 5, United States Code.

(5) **DUTIES.**—

(A) IN GENERAL.—The Director shall—

(i) advise the President on timely and authoritative research regarding public health, technological, and social infrastructure aspects of social connection and loneliness that require attention at the highest levels of the Federal Government;

(ii) advise the President on social connection and loneliness considerations with respect to issues of national concern, including the economy, public health, national security, the environment, and civic and community engagement; and

(iii) with respect to research and development relating to social connection and loneliness—

(I) assist the Director of the Office of Management and Budget with an annual review and analysis of funding proposed for such research and development for all Federal agencies; and
(II) assist the Director of the Office of Management and Budget and the heads of the Federal agencies throughout the budget development process;

(iv) assist the President in providing general leadership and coordination of Federal research and development programs relating to social connection and loneliness;

(v) provide prompt, effective, reliable, and systematic information to the public on the impact of policies and programs conducted by the Federal Government on social connection and maintenance and development of social infrastructure;

(vi) establish, maintain, and update the national strategy in accordance with subparagraph (B); and

(vii) carry out such other activities as the President may determine.

(B) National Strategy.—

(i) In general.—The Office shall establish, maintain, and periodically update an integrated national strategy to improve
social connection, ameliorate loneliness, and slow or stop the progression of social disconnection.

(ii) REQUIREMENT.—The national strategy under clause (i) shall be an inclusive, Federal Government-wide approach that leverages existing Federal resources and authorities to achieve enhanced social connection.

(c) ADVISORY COUNCIL.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 1 year after the date of enactment of this Act, the Director shall establish an intergovernmental advisory council the purpose of which shall be to address loneliness, social disconnection, and social connection experienced by individuals in the United States.

(2) ACTIVITIES.—The Advisory Council shall—

(A) carry out an annual assessment on social connection in accordance with paragraph (5);

(B) provide information on, and coordinate, social connection research and services across all Federal agencies;

(C) encourage the development of effective strategies and approaches to prevent social dis-
connection and improve social infrastructure, quality of life, and community;

(D) review the impact of social disconnection and loneliness on physical, mental, and social health;

(E) to the maximum extent practicable, coordinate with international bodies to integrate and inform the global mission to improve social connection;

(F) advise the Director;

(G) issue national guidelines on social connection; and

(H) carry out such other activities as the Director determines appropriate.

(3) MEMBERSHIP.—

(A) COMPOSITION.—The Advisory Council shall be composed of—

(i) the Director (or the Director’s designee), who shall serve as the Chair of the Advisory Council;

(ii) the Federal members under subparagraph (B); and

(iii) the non-Federal members under subparagraph (C).

(B) FEDERAL MEMBERS.—
(i) IN GENERAL.—In addition to the Director (or the Director’s designee), the Federal members of the Advisory Council shall consist of 1 representative from each of—

   (I) the Department of Commerce;
   (II) the Department of Defense;
   (III) the Department of Education;
   (IV) the Department of Health and Human Services, including—
   (aa) the Administration on Community Living;
   (bb) the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; and
   (cc) the Office of the Director of the National Institutes of Health;
   (V) the Department of Homeland Security;
   (VI) the Department of Housing and Urban Development, including the Office of Community Planning and Development;
   (VII) the Department of Justice;
(VIII) the Department of Labor;
(IX) the Department of the Treasury;
(X) the Department of Transportation;
(XI) the Department of Veterans Affairs;
(XII) the Corporation for National and Community Service; and
(XIII) other relevant Federal agencies, as determined by the Director.

(ii) APPOINTMENT.—The Federal members under clause (i) shall be appointed—

(I) by the head of the respective agency or office; and
(II) so as to ensure that the membership of the Advisory Council is diverse and inclusive.

(C) NON-FEDERAL MEMBERS.—The non-Federal members of the Advisory Council shall be appointed by the Director, and shall consist of experts in their respective fields, including—

(i) 1 or more caregivers;
13
(ii) 1 or more health care providers;
(iii) 1 or more representatives of non-profit organizations that advocate for policies that reduce loneliness and social isolation;
(iv) 1 or more representatives of State, territorial, local, and Tribal governments;
(v) 1 or more researchers from research institutions;
(vi) 1 or more representatives of State education agencies;
(vii) 1 or more representatives of Veterans Service Organizations;
(viii) 1 or more employers;
(ix) 1 or more workplace representatives;
(x) 1 or more representatives of volunteer organizations;
(xi) 1 or more representatives of non-profit organizations that advocate for youth and have youth serving on their boards or in leadership positions;
(xii) 1 or more representatives of community action agencies;
(xiii) 1 or more representatives of dis-
ability rights organizations; and
(xiv) 1 or more representatives of
LGBTQIA+ advocacy organizations.

(4) MEETINGS.—

(A) QUARTERLY MEETINGS.—The Advi-
sory Council shall meet not less frequently than
quarterly, and at the call of the Director.

(B) OPEN MEETINGS.—The meetings of
the Advisory Council shall be open to the pub-
lic.

(5) ANNUAL ASSESSMENT.—Not later than 2
years after the date of enactment of this Act, and
annually thereafter, the Advisory Council shall carry
out an assessment of the progress of the United
States in improving social connection, including—

(A) an assessment of [steps that have
been, or should be, taken]—

(i) to increase the use of the national
strategy described in subsection (b)(5)(B)
in Federal policy development and imple-
mentation;

(ii) to establish a framework to im-
prove and connect social services;
(iii) to promote continuous community-led planning and design to improve social connection through reimagined community spaces, transportation, housing, and technologies;

(iv) to establish and scale community connection programs;

(v) to coordinate public health campaigns that raise awareness and reduce the stigma surrounding loneliness;

(vi) to strengthen measurement practices to increase collection of data measuring loneliness and social connection;

(vii) to provide assistance to State, local, and Tribal governments seeking to improve social connection among residents; and

(viii) to support youth participation in strategies to improve social connection and community connection; and

(B) an assessment of other issues the Director determines appropriate.

(6) ANNUAL REPORT.—Not later than 18 months after the date of enactment of this Act, and annually thereafter, the Advisory Council shall sub-
mit to the Director and Congress a report that describes—

(A) an evaluation of all Federal efforts to address loneliness and improve social connection;

(B) recommendations for legislative changes needed to implement goals described in clauses (i) through (viii) of paragraph (5)(A); and

(C) an evaluation of the implementation, including outcomes, of the national strategy described in subsection (b)(5)(B).

(d) DATA SHARING.—Each Federal agency that has data relating to loneliness and social connection shall share such data with the Director and make such data publicly available, subject to applicable Federal law relating to disclosure of such data, to enable the Advisory Council to complete the reports described in subsection (c)(6).

(e) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There is authorized to be appropriated to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention $5,000,000 for each of fiscal years 2024 through 2029 to conduct or support research on loneliness and social connection.