

To the office of U.S. Senator Cory A. Booker

Re: S 5365 (119th Congress), Community Mental Wellness Worker Training Act • Latest action (2026-08-07): Read twice and referred to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions.
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Community Mental Health Workforce Training Block Grant Act of 2025

The measure, as described from the official record: Increase the number of trained community mental wellness workers by authorizing federal grants to train them, addressing the shortage of mental health professionals in underserved areas.

THE PROPOSAL

This Act establishes a five-year block grant program for states to train community mental wellness workers. The Secretary of Health and Human Services shall allocate funds to states based on population and mental health professional shortage area designations. States have full discretion to design training programs that meet local needs, including partnerships with community colleges, tribal organizations, and nonprofit providers. No federal curriculum or hiring mandates are imposed. States must report annually on the number of workers trained and placed, but no performance penalties apply. The program is funded by redirecting 5% of unobligated balances from the Public Health and Social Services Emergency Fund (as of FY2024). Total funding is capped at \$500 million per year for five years. Oversight is by the HHS Office of Inspector General, which may audit state expenditures. Enforcement: If a state fails to use funds for training within two years, the Secretary shall reallocate those funds to other states. The program sunsets after five years, with a GAO evaluation due one year before sunset.

OPERATIVE PROVISIONS (VFA PROPOSAL)

Funding Source	5% of unobligated balances from the Public Health and Social Services Emergency Fund (PHSSEF) as of FY2024, capped at \$500 million annually.
Funding Amount	\$500 million per year for five years (\$2.5 billion total).
Sunset Years	5 years
Oversight Body	HHS Office of Inspector General (OIG) for audits; Government Accountability Office (GAO) for program evaluation.
Enforcement Mechanism	If a state does not expend at least 80% of its allocation within two fiscal years, the Secretary shall reallocate the unspent funds to other states on a pro-rata basis. No other penalties.
Effective Date	October 1, 2025

CONSTITUTIONAL BASIS

- Article I, Section 8, Clause 1 (Spending Clause – general welfare)
- Tenth Amendment (reserving powers to states)

- South Dakota v. Dole (483 U.S. 203) – spending must be for general welfare, unambiguous, related to federal interest, and not coercive

Concerns with the measure as written:

- The bill may exceed enumerated powers if it mandates federal control over training curricula or hiring, potentially infringing on state police powers under the Tenth Amendment.
- If the grant program imposes conditions that effectively coerce states into adopting federal standards, it could violate the anti-commandeering doctrine and the Spending Clause limitations (South Dakota v. Dole).

WHY BOTH SIDES CAN BACK IT (VFA'S ASSESSMENT)

Democratic priorities: Expands mental health workforce in underserved communities, uses federal funding to address a public health crisis. Republican priorities: Preserves state control over training and hiring, avoids federal mandates, includes a sunset and spending cap, uses existing funds rather than new taxes.

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