

118TH CONGRESS  
2D SESSION

# H. R. 8490

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

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## IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

MAY 22, 2024

Mr. BERA introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Energy and Commerce

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## A BILL

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

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*  
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “National Strategy for  
5 Social Connection Act”.

6 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS.**

7 Congress finds the following:

8 (1) The health of the Nation is rightly meas-  
9 ured not only by its aggregate wealth or global  
10 power, but more centrally by its shared vision and

1 the bonds of connection that knit its people into a  
2 community.

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

11 (3) These changes affect all people of the  
12 United States, but fall with particular force on the  
13 poor and marginalized, on children and adolescents,  
14 on individuals residing in economically disadvan-  
15 taged regions, on veterans and on the elderly, and  
16 individuals without a college degree.

17 (4) The Surgeon General declared an epidemic  
18 of loneliness and isolation on May 2, 2023.

19 (5) According to the Surgeon General, social  
20 isolation and loneliness pose a significant risk to in-  
21 dividual health and longevity, including a 29 percent  
22 increased risk of heart disease, a 32 percent in-  
23 creased risk of stroke, and for older adults, a 50  
24 percent increased risk of developing dementia.

1           (6) Loneliness and social isolation increase the  
2 risk for premature death by 26 percent and 29 per-  
3 cent, respectively.

4           (7) The general flourishing, economic health  
5 and stability of the United States, and the effective  
6 functioning of government and society require re-  
7 newed attention to social connection at every level of  
8 society, from individual and family, to local commu-  
9 nity and Nation.

10          (8) The causal connections between these  
11 changes are complex, and thus the various cultural,  
12 technological, demographic, economic, political and  
13 institutional drivers of social connection require at-  
14 tention from a dedicated expert body that may de-  
15 velop and share knowledge to incorporate into the  
16 national decision making process and align relevant  
17 agency actions.

18          (9) Federal funding for research and policy  
19 around social connection represents an investment in  
20 the future that is indispensable to sustained national  
21 progress and human flourishing, and there should be  
22 continuing national investment in identifying and ex-  
23 panding proven local strategies, assessing how agen-  
24 cies are or are not contributing to social connection,

1 and funding incentives to drive improvement com-  
2 mensurate with addressing contemporary problems.

3 **SEC. 3. OFFICE OF SOCIAL CONNECTION POLICY; NA-**  
4 **TIONAL STRATEGY ON SOCIAL CONNECTION.**

5 (a) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

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

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

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

15 (4) LONELINESS.—The term “loneliness”, with  
16 respect to an individual, means a subjective dis-  
17 tressing experience of an individual that results from  
18 perceived isolation or inadequate meaningful connec-  
19 tion.

20 (5) OFFICE.—The term “Office” means the Of-  
21 fice of Social Connection Policy.

22 (6) SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS.—The term “so-  
23 cial connectedness” means the degree to which an  
24 individual or community achieves and maintains so-  
25 cial connection needs.

1           (7) SOCIAL CONNECTION.—The term “social  
2 connection” means a continuum of the size and di-  
3 versity of an individual’s social network and roles,  
4 the functions such relationships and roles serve, and  
5 the positive or negative qualities of such relation-  
6 ships and roles.

7           (8) SOCIAL DISCONNECTION.—The term “social  
8 disconnection” means objective or subjective deficits  
9 in social connection, including deficits in social rela-  
10 tionships and roles, the functions such relationships  
11 and roles serve, and the positive or negative qualities  
12 of such relationships and roles.

13           (9) SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE.—The term “so-  
14 cial infrastructure” means the programs (such as  
15 volunteer organizations, sports groups, religious  
16 groups, and member associations), policies (such as  
17 public transportation, housing, and education), and  
18 physical elements (such as libraries, parks, green  
19 spaces, and playgrounds) of a community that sup-  
20 port the development of social connection.

21           (10) SOCIAL ISOLATION.—The term “social iso-  
22 lation”, with respect to an individual, means that  
23 the individual objectively has few social relation-  
24 ships, social roles, or group memberships and has in-  
25 frequent social interaction.

1 (b) OFFICE OF SOCIAL CONNECTION POLICY.—

2 (1) IN GENERAL.—There is established within  
3 the Executive Office of the President an office, to be  
4 known as the “Office of Social Connection Policy”.

5 (2) PURPOSES.—The purposes of the Office  
6 shall be to provide to the President independent, ex-  
7 pert judgment and assistance on policy matters that  
8 require accurate assessments of social connection.

9 (3) DIRECTOR.—

10 (A) IN GENERAL.—The head of the Office  
11 shall be the Director, who shall be appointed by  
12 the President, by and with the advice and con-  
13 sent of the Senate.

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

18 (4) ASSOCIATE DIRECTORS.—

19 (A) IN GENERAL.—The President may ap-  
20 point, by and with the advice and consent of the  
21 Senate, not more than 4 Associate Directors of  
22 the Office.

23 (B) COMPENSATION.—An Associate Direc-  
24 tor appointed under subparagraph (A) shall be  
25 compensated at the rate provided for level V of

1 the Executive Schedule under section 5316 of  
2 title 5, United States Code.

3 (5) DUTIES.—

4 (A) IN GENERAL.—The Director shall—

5 (i) advise the President on timely and  
6 authoritative research regarding public  
7 health, technological, and social infrastruc-  
8 ture aspects of social connection and loneli-  
9 ness that require attention at the highest  
10 levels of the Federal Government;

11 (ii) advise the President on social con-  
12 nection and loneliness considerations with  
13 respect to issues of national concern, in-  
14 cluding the economy, public health, na-  
15 tional security, the environment, and civic  
16 and community engagement;

17 (iii) with respect to research and de-  
18 velopment relating to social connection and  
19 loneliness—

20 (I) assist the Director of the Of-  
21 fice of Management and Budget with  
22 an annual review and analysis of  
23 funding proposed for such research  
24 and development for all Federal agen-  
25 cies; and

1 (II) assist the Director of the Of-  
2 fice of Management and Budget and  
3 the heads of the Federal agencies  
4 throughout the budget development  
5 process;

6 (iv) assist the President in providing  
7 general leadership and coordination of  
8 Federal research and development pro-  
9 grams relating to social connection and  
10 loneliness;

11 (v) provide prompt, effective, reliable,  
12 and systematic information to the public  
13 on the impact of policies and programs  
14 conducted by the Federal Government on  
15 social connection and maintenance and de-  
16 velopment of social infrastructure;

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

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

22 (B) NATIONAL STRATEGY.—

23 (i) IN GENERAL.—The Office shall es-  
24 tablish, maintain, and periodically update  
25 an integrated national strategy to improve



1 social connection, ameliorate loneliness,  
2 and slow or stop the progression of social  
3 disconnection.

4 (ii) REQUIREMENT.—The national  
5 strategy under clause (i) shall be an inclu-  
6 sive, Federal Government-wide approach  
7 that leverages existing Federal resources  
8 and authorities to achieve enhanced social  
9 connection.

10 (c) ADVISORY COUNCIL.—

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

17 (2) ACTIVITIES.—The Advisory Council shall—

18 (A) carry out an annual assessment on so-  
19 cial connection in accordance with paragraph  
20 (5);

21 (B) provide information on, and coordi-  
22 nate, social connection research and services  
23 across all Federal agencies;

24 (C) encourage the development of effective  
25 strategies and approaches to prevent social dis-

1 connection and improve social infrastructure,  
2 quality of life, and community;

3 (D) review the impact of social disconnec-  
4 tion and loneliness on physical, mental, and so-  
5 cial health;

6 (E) to the maximum extent practicable, co-  
7 ordinate with international bodies to integrate  
8 and inform the global mission to improve social  
9 connection;

10 (F) advise the Director;

11 (G) issue national guidelines on social con-  
12 nection; and

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

15 (3) MEMBERSHIP.—

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

18 (i) the Director (or the Director’s des-  
19 ignee), who shall serve as the Chair of the  
20 Advisory Council;

21 (ii) the Federal members under sub-  
22 paragraph (B); and

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

25 (B) FEDERAL MEMBERS.—

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

6 (I) the Department of Commerce;

7 (II) the Department of Defense;

8 (III) the Department of Edu-  
9 cation;

10 (IV) the Department of Health  
11 and Human Services, including—

12 (aa) the Administration on  
13 Community Living;

14 (bb) the Centers for Disease  
15 Control and Prevention; and

16 (cc) the Office of the Direc-  
17 tor of the National Institutes of  
18 Health;

19 (V) the Department of Homeland  
20 Security;

21 (VI) the Department of Housing  
22 and Urban Development, including  
23 the Office of Community Planning  
24 and Development;

25 (VII) the Department of Justice;

1 (VIII) the Department of Labor;

2 (IX) the Department of the

3 Treasury;

4 (X) the Department of Transpor-

5 tation;

6 (XI) the Department of Veterans

7 Affairs;

8 (XII) the Corporation for Na-

9 tional and Community Service; and

10 (XIII) other relevant Federal

11 agencies, as determined by the Direc-

12 tor.

13 (ii) APPOINTMENT.—The Federal

14 members under clause (i) shall be ap-

15 pointed—

16 (I) by the head of the respective

17 agency or office; and

18 (II) so as to ensure that the

19 membership of the Advisory Council is

20 diverse and inclusive.

21 (C) NON-FEDERAL MEMBERS.—The non-

22 Federal members of the Advisory Council shall

23 be appointed by the Director, and shall consist

24 of experts in their respective fields, including—

25 (i) 1 or more caregivers;

- 1 (ii) 1 or more health care providers;
- 2 (iii) 1 or more representatives of non-  
3 profit organizations that advocate for poli-  
4 cies that reduce loneliness and social isola-  
5 tion;
- 6 (iv) 1 or more representatives of  
7 State, territorial, local, and Tribal govern-  
8 ments;
- 9 (v) 1 or more researchers from re-  
10 search institutions;
- 11 (vi) 1 or more representatives of State  
12 education agencies;
- 13 (vii) 1 or more representatives of Vet-  
14 erans Service Organizations;
- 15 (viii) 1 or more employers;
- 16 (ix) 1 or more workplace representa-  
17 tives;
- 18 (x) 1 or more representatives of volun-  
19 teer organizations;
- 20 (xi) 1 or more representatives of non-  
21 profit organizations that advocate for  
22 youth and have youth serving on their  
23 boards or in leadership positions;
- 24 (xii) 1 or more representatives of com-  
25 munity action agencies;

1 (xiii) 1 or more representatives of dis-  
2 ability rights organizations; and

3 (xiv) 1 or more representatives of  
4 LGBTQIA+ advocacy organizations.

5 (4) MEETINGS.—

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

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

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

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

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

23 (ii) to establish a framework to im-  
24 prove and connect social services;

1 (iii) to promote continuous commu-  
2 nity-led planning and design to improve so-  
3 cial connection through reimagined com-  
4 munity spaces, transportation, housing,  
5 and technologies;

6 (iv) to establish and scale community  
7 connection programs;

8 (v) to coordinate public health cam-  
9 paigns that raise awareness and reduce the  
10 stigma surrounding loneliness;

11 (vi) to strengthen measurement prac-  
12 tices to increase collection of data meas-  
13 uring loneliness and social connection;

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

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

21 (B) an assessment of other issues the Di-  
22 rector determines appropriate.

23 (6) ANNUAL REPORT.—Not later than 18  
24 months after the date of enactment of this Act, and  
25 annually thereafter, the Advisory Council shall sub-

1       mit to the Director and Congress a report that de-  
2       scribes—

3               (A) an evaluation of all Federal efforts to  
4               address loneliness and improve social connec-  
5               tion;

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

10              (C) an evaluation of the implementation,  
11              including outcomes, of the national strategy de-  
12              scribed in subsection (b)(5)(B).

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

20       (e) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There is  
21       authorized to be appropriated to the Centers for Disease  
22       Control and Prevention \$5,000,000 for each of fiscal years  
23       2024 through 2029 to conduct or support research on  
24       loneliness and social connection.

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