

HB597 INTRODUCED



1 HB597
2 XD3QHZZ-1
3 By Representatives McClammy, Hassell, Lands, Lawrence, Jones,
4 Drummond, Morris, Bracy, Moore (M), Sellers, McCampbell,
5 Datcher, Travis, Hendrix, Jackson, Rafferty, Warren, Tillman,
6 Chestnut, Hall, Ensler, Hollis, Gray, Daniels
7 RFD: Ways and Means General Fund
8 First Read: 10-Mar-26



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SYNOPSIS:

This bill creates the Rural Behavioral and Mental Health Access Act to expand access to mental health and substance use treatment in rural areas by funding new clinics, supporting telehealth services, integrating behavioral care into primary settings, and improving and enhancing the rural mental health workforce.

A BILL
TO BE ENTITLED
AN ACT

Relating to mental health and substance use treatment in rural areas; to establish a grant program for rural health facilities; to require the Alabama Department of Mental Health to help fund primary care practices that integrate behavioral health services; to establish a scholarship and loan repayment program for licensed behavioral health providers in rural areas; and to create the Rural Behavioral and Mental Health Access Fund.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF ALABAMA:

Section 1. This act shall be known as the Rural Behavioral and Mental Health Access Act.



HB597 INTRODUCED

29 Section 2. As used in this act, unless otherwise
30 specified or unless the context requires otherwise, the
31 following terms have the following meanings:

32 (1) BEHAVIORAL HEALTH PROVIDER. A licensed
33 psychiatrist, psychologist, social worker, counselor,
34 addiction specialist, or psychiatric nurse practitioner.

35 (2) DEPARTMENT. Alabama Department of Mental Health.

36 (3) RURAL AREA. Any area within this state not included
37 within the boundaries of any incorporated city or town having
38 a population in excess of 25,000 inhabitants, according to the
39 last federal decennial census.

40 Section 3. (a) There is hereby created a fund which
41 shall be known as the Rural Behavioral Health and Mental
42 Health Access Fund in the State Treasury for providing grants,
43 scholarships, and funds for the programs pursuant to this act.

44 (b) The fund shall consist of gifts, grants, federal
45 funds, or legislative appropriations for purposes of
46 administering this act and providing funding for grants,
47 scholarships, and providing technical assistance for primary
48 care practices that integrate behavioral health services.

49 (c) Amounts in the fund shall be budgeted and allotted
50 in accordance with Sections 41-4-69 through 41-4-80 and
51 Sections 41-19-1 through 41-19-12, Code of Alabama 1975.

52 Section 4. (a) Subject to funds being available for
53 such purpose, the department shall establish a competitive
54 grant program to:

55 (1) Support construction, renovation, or expansion of
56 rural mental health and substance use treatment facilities;



HB597 INTRODUCED

57 and

58 (2) Fund staffing and start-up operational costs.

59 (b) Eligible applicants for this grant include
60 nonprofits, community health centers, counties, and tribal
61 entities.

62 Section 5. (a) Subject to funds being available for
63 such purpose, the department shall offer grants to rural
64 providers for:

65 (1) Purchase of telehealth-capable diagnostic and
66 therapy equipment;

67 (2) Broadband installation and technical support; and

68 (3) Staff training in telebehavioral health delivery.

69 (b) Priority shall be given to providers serving
70 high-need, low-access rural populations.

71 Section 6. (a) Subject to funds being available for
72 such purpose, The department shall fund primary care practices
73 that integrate behavioral health services through:

74 (1) Hiring or co-locating mental health professionals.

75 (2) Implementing collaborative care models.

76 (3) Establishing warm hand-off and care coordination
77 protocols.

78 (b) The department shall make all reasonable efforts to
79 provide technical assistance to support the implementation of
80 these services.

81 Section 7. (a) Subject to funds being available for
82 such purpose, the department shall offer financial incentives
83 to build the rural mental health workforce including:

84 (1) Scholarships for students entering behavioral



HB597 INTRODUCED

85 health fields who commit to rural practice; and

86 (2) Loan repayment for licensed providers who work in
87 rural areas for at least two years.

88 (b) Funds may be used for tuition, licensure fees, and
89 relocation costs.

90 Section 8. The department shall adopt rules necessary
91 to implement, administer, and facilitate this act.

92 Section 9. This act shall become effective on October
93 1, 2026.