

U.S. Congress Starts Consideration of Offshore Wind Training Grant Program

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On June 3, 2019, Rep. William Keating of Massachusetts and four colleagues introduced the Offshore Wind Jobs and Opportunity Act (H.R. 3068) in the U.S. House of Representatives to establish a new federal training grant program focused on the offshore wind industry. A companion bill was introduced in the U.S. Senate sponsored by Senators Edward J. Markey, Tom Carper, Sheldon Whitehouse, and Susan Collins on June 11 (S. 1769).

Although there are differences between the two bills, both would authorize up to \$25 million per fiscal year in training grants by the Secretary of Interior to support training of the workers that will be needed in the fast developing U.S. offshore wind industry.

The Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) in the Department of Interior has already entered into 15 active leases in federal waters supporting at least 21 gigawatts of generating capacity. The Northeast Wind Resource Center has estimated that 35,000 jobs will be created to support the first 8 gigawatts of generating capacity. An April 2019 report from McKinsey & Company entitled “Scaling the US East Coast offshore wind industry to 20 gigawatts and beyond” indicated that there is a significant concern that there will be a lack of trained personnel to install and maintain the planned capacity.

The maximum amount for a training grant in the proposed legislation would be \$2.5 million and the House bill reserves at least 25 percent of grants for community colleges. Both bills restrict eligible recipients to higher education institutions and labor organizations and prioritize training in certain areas, such as distressed areas, or certain persons, such as veterans. The new proposals will supplement training programs already announced by several northeastern states.

The House bill had its first favorable hearing on June 11 in the Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources, chaired by Rep. Alan Lowenthal, of the House Natural Resources Committee. All of the witnesses spoke in favor of the legislation. Rep. Paul Gosar, the ranking member of the Subcommittee, asserted that the legislation should not proceed without a fiscal offset.

Even if the legislation passes both chambers and is signed by the President into law, funding will only be available if Congress appropriates amounts authorized for grants.

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