



Senate passes Durbin, Roberts legislation to support rural EMS agencies as part of final farm bill

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WASHINGTON – Today, U.S. Senators Dick Durbin (D-IL) and Pat Roberts (R-KS) applauded Senate passage of the *Agriculture and Nutrition Act of 2018*, also known as the Farm Bill, which includes their bill to reauthorize a federal grant program that directly supports rural emergency medical services (EMS) agencies in training and recruiting staff, conducting courses to satisfy certification requirements, and purchasing equipment—for everything from naloxone and first aid kits, to power stretchers or new ambulances.

Durbin and Roberts, along with Senators Debbie Stabenow (D-MI) and Tammy Baldwin (D-WI), originally introduced the bipartisan [Supporting and Improving Rural EMS Needs \(SIREN\) Act](#) in May 2018, which will provide grant funding through the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) for public, tribal, and private non-profit agencies in rural communities nationwide. Once the House of Representatives passes this version of the Farm Bill, it will head to the President's desk for signature.

“Rural EMS agencies are the backbone of their communities. When I met with EMTs and fire chiefs across Illinois this year, they explained how they’re asked to do so much – responding to the opioid crisis and the needs of an aging America – often with scarce resources and tight budgets. The bill I sponsored with Senator Roberts will provide rural EMS agencies with new funding that will help them better serve their communities. Whether it’s training and recruiting staff, purchasing new equipment, or providing courses to employees that can help them gain more certifications, including this bill in the final Farm Bill is a boost to local emergency response efforts,” Durbin said. “I’d also like to applaud my colleagues on coming to a bipartisan agreement on the Farm Bill.

Farmers across the nation depend on this legislation so they can plan ahead and support the economy through their hard work. The President should waste no time signing this bill into law.”

“Including the SIREN Act in the Farm Bill conference report will provide critical resources for extending emergency medical services to patients in rural and remote areas,”Roberts said.

A recent decline in primary care and hospital service availability, great distances between health care facilities, and low insurance reimbursement for transport and emergency treatment have all strained rural EMS agencies. At the same time, EMS agencies today are tasked with ever-greater responsibilities—preparing for natural and manmade disasters and bioterror threats, supporting the chronic and emergency care needs of an aging population, and responding on the front lines of the opioid epidemic. These first responders are often the only health care providers in their area and face difficulty in personnel recruitment and retention, and securing expensive equipment. In Illinois, up to 500 distinct rural EMS agencies would be eligible to apply for federal grant funding under the *SIREN Act*.

The *SIREN Act* is supported by the National Association of Emergency Medical Technicians, International Association of Fire Chiefs, National Association of Counties, National Association of Towns and Townships, and National Volunteer Fire Council.