

# **Durbin Announces \$5 Million in New Rural EMS Funding in Year-End Funding Bill**

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WASHINGTON – U.S. Senator Dick Durbin (D-IL), a member of the Senate Agriculture Committee and Senate Appropriations Committee, today announced the inclusion of \$5 million in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 appropriations bill for a new grant program that supports rural fire and emergency medical services (EMS). The funding, created through Durbin’s *Supporting and Improving Rural EMS Needs (SIREN) Act*, supports EMS agencies in training and recruiting staff, conducting certification courses, and purchasing equipment—for everything from naloxone and first aid kits, to power stretchers or new ambulances. Durbin’s bipartisan *SIREN Act* was signed into law last year as part of the Farm Bill and this is the first year of annual funding for the grant program.

**“In many small and rural towns in Illinois and across the country, rural fire and EMS agencies are a lifeline in their communities. One of the biggest challenges I’ve heard from rural EMS professionals is a lack of steady funding to support their operations. After meeting with rural EMS officials from Nauvoo, Illinois, I introduced the *SIREN Act* last year. I’m pleased this new grant program can finally start bringing much needed funding to our rural communities,”** Durbin said.

Earlier this year, Durbin joined leaders from the Nauvoo Fire Protection District to discuss passage and implementation of the *SIREN Act*. He was joined by Mark Kennedy, a paramedic for the Nauvoo Fire Protection District and Chair of the Illinois chapter of the National Association of EMTs, whose advocacy efforts helped with passage of the *SIREN Act*.

A 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 addition to supporting rural fire and EMS agencies, Durbin introduced bipartisan legislation this year to address rural health workforce shortages. Introduced in August, the [\*Rural America Health Corps Act\*](#), would authorize a new \$25 million program that would provide additional loan forgiveness funding through the National Health Service Corps program for health professionals that serve in rural communities.