



As Workplace Infections and Deaths Rise, Duckworth, Durbin, Baldwin, Colleagues Introduce Legislation to Protect Workers from COVID-19

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WASHINGTON, D.C.] – U.S. Senators Tammy Duckworth (D-IL) and Dick Durbin (D-IL) joined Senator Tammy Baldwin (D-WI) in introducing legislation to protect U.S. workers, including those on the frontlines of the COVID-19 pandemic, in response to disturbing and widespread reports of unsafe workplaces leading to preventable illnesses and deaths. The *COVID-19 Every Worker Protection Act* would require the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) to issue an Emergency Temporary Standard that establishes a legal obligation for all workplaces to implement comprehensive infectious disease exposure control plans to keep workers safe during the COVID-19 pandemic.

“Our nation’s health care workers are on the front lines as we work to defend Americans from COVID-19,” Duckworth said. “They deserve to be as protected as they can be as they take on greater risks to keep the rest of us safe, and this legislation will help ensure they are.”

“COVID-19 presents a serious risk to frontline health care workers and other workers in essential services,” Durbin said. “In order to improve protective measures and keep our workers healthy, our bill would direct the Occupational Safety and Health Administration to set clear requirements to keep workers safe during the COVID-19 pandemic.”

“We cannot combat this pandemic if we do not take immediate action to protect the millions of health care workers, food-service and grocery store workers, and all those working on the frontlines every day to confront this pandemic and move our economy forward,” Baldwin said. “This legislation is the single best way to require all workplaces

to protect the health and safety of their workers and prevent additional outbreaks and further spread of the coronavirus.”

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, more than 9,000 U.S. health care workers have been infected with COVID-19. Outbreaks have been reported at a wide range of workplaces across the country, including one meat processing plant where more than 500 workers were infected with the virus.

Although the CDC issued guidance to protect workers, the guidance is not binding and OSHA currently has no enforceable standard to protect workers from airborne infectious diseases, leaving the nation’s workers at an elevated risk of exposure to the coronavirus at a time when they are needed most.

The Occupational Safety and Health Act gives the Department of Labor the authority to issue an Emergency Temporary Standard if employees are exposed to grave danger from new hazards. However, despite repeated calls from Committee Democrats to issue an Emergency Temporary Standard, the Department has made no effort to establish enforceable safety standards to protect workers from COVID-19.

The *COVID-19 Every Worker Protection Act* directs OSHA to issue an Emergency Temporary Standard within 7 days that sets requirements for how workplaces must safeguard workers against the spread of the coronavirus. The legislation expands on a previous proposal, the *COVID-19 Workers First Protection Act* (S. 3584), by requiring OSHA to issue a standard covering all U.S. workers, including workers in health care facilities, warehouses, grocery stores, and food processing plants.

In addition to Duckworth, Durbin and Baldwin, the legislation is cosponsored by Senators Sherrod Brown (D-OH), Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), Cory Booker (D-NJ), Bob Casey (D-PA), Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY), Kamala Harris (D-CA), Tim Kaine (D-VA), Angus King (I-ME), Amy Klobuchar (D-MN), Ed Markey (D-MA), Bob Menendez (D-NJ), Patty Murray (D-WA), Bernie Sanders (I-VT), Tina Smith (D-MN), Chris Van Hollen (D-MD), Elizabeth Warren (D-MA) and Ron Wyden (D-OR).

House Education and Labor Committee Chairman Robert C. “Bobby” Scott (D-VA-03), Workforce Protections Subcommittee Chairwoman Alma Adams (D-NC-12), and Congresswoman Donna Shalala (D-FL-27) and 27 colleagues introduced a companion bill in the House, as well.