



# Duckworth Speaks with Illinois Legislative Black Caucus about the COVID-19 Pandemic

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– U.S. Senator Tammy Duckworth (D-IL), [co-founder of the Senate’s first-ever Environmental Justice Caucus](#), spoke by phone with the Illinois Legislative Black Caucus about the COVID-19 pandemic. During this call, Duckworth discussed the shortcomings of recent relief packages and highlighted priorities she will push for in a future bill, including more funding for state and local governments, additional money for unemployment insurance and SNAP, more PPE for frontline and essential workers, more tests and fair lending to minority, women and Veteran-owned small businesses. Earlier this month, Duckworth and the Illinois congressional delegation [sent a letter](#) to the Administration expressing strong concerns regarding the racial disparities that exist in COVID-19 cases and deaths in Illinois and across the nation.

“The awful truth is that here in Illinois, COVID-19 isn’t tomorrow’s nightmare; it’s today’s reality and that’s especially true in communities of color across our state and our nation,” said Duckworth. “I was glad to have the opportunity to speak with the Illinois Legislative Black Caucus about what we need to do to better protect and support communities of color who are once again getting hit the hardest by a public health crisis while too many folks in the Trump Administration look the other way.”

Since the COVID-19 public health crisis began, Senator Duckworth has led with a wide range of actions to support middle-class working Americans and help our nation better respond to the pandemic, [including supporting the Families First Coronavirus Response Act](#) that’s now law, refocusing the Trump Administration’s efforts on testing and access to tests. She also [voted for the Coronavirus Aid Relief and Economic Security \(CARES\) Act](#), which makes important progress to help Americans address and recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. While not perfect, the bipartisan compromise does put workers and their families—not corporations—first by putting cash directly in the pockets of consumers, greatly expanding emergency unemployment insurance and providing

immediate relief for small businesses. The *CARES Act* also includes transparent oversight of bailed-out corporations and additional resources for state and local governments—as well as our hospitals and health centers—that are all on the front lines of this crisis. Duckworth [supported the supplemental funding bill](#) to provide more money to small businesses, hospitals and health care workers.

Duckworth was one of the first Senators to [urge](#) the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to immediately establish clear diagnostic testing procedures, capabilities and production capacity to better mitigate the spread of COVID-19. After [calling on the President to swiftly take action under the Defense Production Act \(DPA\) to boost production of live-saving ventilators](#) and other equipment needed to limit the spread of COVID-19, Duckworth helped [introduce new legislation](#) to require him to do so to help save lives. [She also introduced](#) the *COVID-19 Health Care Worker Protection Act* to help keep frontline healthcare workers safe, cosponsored the *Free COVID-19 Testing Act* to expand access to free tests, [helped introduce](#) the comprehensive *COVID-19 RELIEF for Small Businesses Act* of 2020 to support small businesses across the country and give them the resources they need to weather this crisis and she helped introduce legislation that [was signed into law](#) to make sure student Veterans and their loved ones receiving benefits through the GI Bill don't lose them as universities move online. Duckworth also [joined her colleagues](#) on the *PAID (Providing Americans Insured Days) Leave Act* to ensure workers can take time off when ill and [helped introduce](#) the *Small Business Debt Relief Act* of 2020 to support small businesses affected by the pandemic by relieving certain federal loan payments.

After hundreds of passengers were forced into close quarters for hours to clear federal medical screenings at customs at O'Hare International Airport, Duckworth [joined U.S. Senator Dick Durbin \(D-IL\) in demanding](#) additional federal resources. She [called on Donald Trump to do more to bring back Illinoisans](#) and other Americans stranded abroad as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. She [also called](#) on the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to work together to ensure civilian healthcare workers are trained to use military-issued respirator masks and other personal protective equipment that DOD has made available to civilian healthcare providers. [Duckworth spoke out](#) about Republican attempts to deny funding to healthcare providers that receive Medicaid, thereby making it harder for vulnerable groups—including people with disabilities, older Americans and survivors of rape and abuse—to access critical services they rely on, like home care assistance or meal delivery programs. Along with Senator Durbin, [she sent a letter](#) to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) calling on the agency to grant the State of Illinois flexibility to expand access to health services and have the flexibility to deliver quality care amid this public health crisis, [which CMS ultimately granted](#). Duckworth [joined a bipartisan group](#) of Senators urging the Trump Administration expand access to telehealth services to rural communities and she [pressed](#) the Centers for Disease Control

and Prevention (CDC) for information on a potential shortage of enzymes needed for CDC coronavirus test kits. The Senator is [also seeking information](#) from Secretary of Defense Mark Esper about any proactive steps the Department of Defense is taking to ensure the readiness of National Guard and Reserve units to support local civilian authorities as the pandemic spreads. Duckworth also joined the Illinois Democratic Congressional delegation in [sending](#) a letter to U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Alex Azar expressing strong concerns regarding the racial disparities that exist in COVID-19 cases and deaths in Illinois and across the nation.

For more information about resources available to Illinoisans and what the Senator has done throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, [click here](#).