



Durbin Joins Bipartisan Letter Outlining Priorities To Support First Responders In The Next Covid-19 Relief Bill

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WASHINGTON — U.S. Senator Dick Durbin (D-IL) joined Senators Chris Coons (D-DE), Susan Collins (R-ME), and nine of his colleagues on a bipartisan [letter](#) to Senate Leadership encouraging additional support for first responders in the next COVID-19 relief package.

“During a time of crisis, communities rely on local first responders as the first line of defense for protection and emergency response,” the Senators wrote. “As Congress considers further legislation in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, we urge you to include additional support for our nation’s first responders who work in some of the highest risk occupations for COVID-19 exposure.”

The Senators detailed the following priorities for first responders:

- Bolster Assistance to Firefighter Grant, Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER), and Department of Justice grant funding, including for the Community Oriented Policing Services program, so that state and local police, fire, and EMS departments can access resources to purchase and be reimbursed for PPE and other COVID-19 related expenses, recruit and retain employees and volunteers, and cover overtime, backfill costs, authorized hazard pay, and COVID-19-related paid sick leave during the crisis.
- Require that the Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security waive the cost share and maintenance of expenditure requirements for Assistance to Firefighter Grants for reimbursement of COVID-19-related expenses through FY21.
- Require that the Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security grant waivers to SAFER grant recipients for employee retention to aid staffing shortages through

FY21. In addition, any legislation should retroactively require that the Secretary grant such waivers for FY19 and FY20 SAFER funds.

- Waive the prohibition on hazard pay for federal firefighters under 5 U.S.C. § 5545b (d)(1) for purposes of COVID-19 response, provide funding to federal agencies sufficient to cover hazard pay to frontline federal firefighters and law enforcement officers when appropriate, extend overtime pay to U.S. Probation Officers, and waive the federal firefighter and law enforcement officer overtime cap under 5 U.S. C. § 5547.
- Address the gap in paid sick leave coverage for first responders by requiring that the employing agency, not the employee, provide up to 80 hours of paid sick leave should these departments order the employee to self-quarantine in accordance with Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines due to potential COVID-19 exposure.
- Create a presumption in the Public Safety Officers' Benefits Program that a public safety officer's infection of COVID-19 resulted from their employment to clearly establish eligibility for benefits due to the pandemic.
- Prevent the taxation of state and local incentives for volunteer firefighters and EMS personnel beyond 2020 in order to help departments continue to recruit and retain volunteer personnel.

In addition to Durbin, Coons, and Collins, the letter was signed by Senators Tom Carper (D-DE), Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), Mark Warner (D-VA), Angus King (I-ME), Jon Tester (D-MT), Chris Van Hollen (D-MD), Ron Wyden (D-OR), Bob Casey (D-PA), and Amy Klobuchar (D-MN).

The Senators' effort is supported by the Fraternal Order of Police, the National Association of Police Organizations, the Federal Law Enforcement Officers Association, the International Association of Fire Fighters, the National Volunteer Fire Council, and the Congressional Fire Services Institute.

The full text of the letter is available [here](#) and below: