



Durbin: Health Heroes Act Can Address Health Care Workforce Shortages To Meet Nationwide Challenges Highlighted By COVID-19

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WASHINGTON – U.S. Senator Dick Durbin (D-IL) today spoke on the Senate floor about his [Health Heroes 2020 Act](#) (S.3634), bicameral legislation to provide a historic investment in the National Health Service Corps (NHSC) and Nurse Corps programs to cover graduate education costs for more than 300,000 clinicians in order to help address existing health workforce shortages throughout our health care system. The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed existing health workforce shortages, while simultaneously imposing unprecedented strains on America’s heroic frontline health professionals. A substantial barrier in meeting our nation’s health workforce needs is the student debt associated with graduate health education—which can average more than \$200,000. COVID-19 has also magnified alarming racial and ethnic disparities in health outcomes, which can be addressed in part by expanding the representation of minority populations working in health careers.

“We are in desperate need of additional doctors, nurses, dentists, and medical professionals... to make sure that we expand the reach of medical care in the United States in the midst of this coronavirus pandemic,” Durbin said. “There is one way to reach that goal, I believe, and that is to incentivize medical students and dental students in America to make a commitment to serve in areas of greatest need in this country for at least two years and remain in reserve – if needed – for medical emergency. And what would they receive in return? Forgiveness of the cost of their medical education.”

Footage of Durbin’s remarks on the Senate floor is available [here](#).

Video of Durbin’s remarks on the Senate floor is available [here](#).

Audio of Durbin's remarks on the Senate floor is available [here](#).

Durbin introduced the *Health Heroes 2020 Act* with U.S. Representative Jan Schakowsky's (D-IL-09) to address health care workforce challenges and entice promising students from diverse backgrounds—physicians, dentists, mental health professionals, nurses, and physician assistants—into primary health careers in underserved communities by providing historic new funding levels for scholarship and loan repayment options in exchange for a service commitment in an urban or rural area with a shortage of providers.

The legislation would also immediately surge \$30 billion into the NHSC and Nurse Corps, further increase the annual funding level for NHSC by 300 percent, and create a new Reserve Corps to boost our health care surge capacity in response to public health emergencies.

The United States is projected to face a shortage of up to 120,000 doctors over the next decade, and the need for an estimated 200,000 new nurses for each of the next several years. Within these fields, there are significant shortages in both urban and rural communities as well as among specialties, including in primary care and behavioral health. COVID-19 has upended this equation, with providers being called back into service from retirement, fourth-year medical students being graduated early, and health professionals traveling across state lines to deliver care.

Along with Durbin and Schakowsky, the bill is also cosponsored by Senators Tammy Duckworth (D-IL), Doug Jones (D-AL), Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), Debbie Stabenow (D-MI), Amy Klobuchar (D-MI), Jeff Merkley (D-OR), Tammy Baldwin (D-WI), Mazie Hirono (D-HI), Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY), Tina Smith (D-MN), Bernie Sanders (I-VT), Kamala Harris (D-CA), and Jacky Rosen (D-NV).