

Durbin, Duckworth, Bustos, Illinois Delegation Members Urge FEMA to Expedite Public Assistance Reimbursements for COVID-19 Expenses

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WASHINGTON – U.S. Senators Dick Durbin (D-IL) and Tammy Duckworth (D-IL), along with U.S. Representative Cheri Bustos (D-IL-17), today led Democratic members of the Illinois Congressional Delegation in sending a letter to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) expressing concerns over the agency's processing of the State's requests for Public Assistance as it relates to COVID-19 expenses. States may apply to be reimbursed for eligible costs related to emergency protective measures amid the pandemic, such as purchases of PPE or testing supplies. To date, FEMA has approved less than five percent of Illinois' submitted claims, while taking an average of more than 90 days to process a claim. Furthermore, the delegation members cited reports that FEMA has retroactively applied new guidance to previously submitted claims, and further, that it has applied unpublished guidance to claims. These apparently retroactive or unofficial policies have been used to justify denials of reimbursement applications.

“We request expedient clarification on these policies and subsequent denials, as untimely guidance, nontransparent procedures, and moving goalposts only make it more difficult for States to navigate federal aid—and at a time when their resources are already thinly stretched,” Durbin said.

The following Illinois Congressional Delegation members joined Durbin, Duckworth, and Bustos in signing today’s letter: U.S. Representatives Bobby Rush (D-IL-01), Robin Kelly (D-IL-02), Dan Lipinski (D-IL-03), Chuy Garcia (D-IL-04), Mike Quigley (D-IL-05), Sean Casten (D-IL-06), Danny Davis (D-IL-07), Raja Krishnamoorthi (D-IL-08), Jan Schakowsky (D-IL-09), Brad Schneider (D-IL-10), Bill Foster (D-IL-11), and Lauren Underwood (D-IL-14).

Full text of today’s letter is available [here](#) and below:

October 27, 2020

Dear Administrator Gaynor,

While we appreciate the support that the Federal Emergency Management Agency’s (FEMA) has thus far provided to the State of Illinois, we are writing today to express concerns with FEMA’s processing of the State’s requests for Public Assistance as it relates to COVID-19 expenses.

To date, FEMA has approved less than five percent of Illinois’s submitted claims, while taking an average of more than 90 days to process a claim. Furthermore, we have received reports that your agency has retroactively applied new guidance to previously submitted claims, and further, that it has applied unpublished guidance to claims. We also have received reports that these belated or unofficial policies have been used to justify denials of reimbursement applications.

We request expedient clarification on these policies and subsequent denials, as untimely guidance, nontransparent procedures, and moving goalposts only make it more difficult for States to navigate federal aid—and at a time when their resources are already thinly stretched.

We urge you to direct your agency to be transparent, timely, and communicative as possible as they enforce administrative requirements, and to bear in mind the overarching goal to assist already-burdened states in this time of need.

We look forward to hearing from you and stand ready should you need our assistance.

Sincerely,