

Durbin Statement on Introduction of COVID-19 Emergency Relief Bills

December 15 2020 8:59 AM



WASHINGTON – U.S. Senate Democratic Whip Dick Durbin (D-IL) today released the following statement in support of the \$748 billion, bipartisan COVID-19 emergency relief legislation that includes funding for unemployment insurance, small businesses, vaccine distribution and COVID-19 testing, health care providers, housing and education assistance, and more:

“Today, the U.S. hit another grim milestone—300,000 lives lost to COVID-19. My heart goes out to the family and friends of those dealing with grief and sadness. It is clear that we are at a critical moment. I’m hopeful that with the first shipment of a vaccine arriving today at hospitals across the country, we will be able to turn the corner on this pandemic. But we also know that it will take time and resources to vaccinate enough people, and the winter is going to be hard for many families and businesses.

“With this in mind, a group of Democrats and Republicans—including myself—came together and worked on compromise, emergency relief legislation totaling \$748 billion in the areas where we could agree. This package does not include everything I think we need. But, it is an honest compromise.

“I’m disappointed we haven’t been able to bridge our differences on several other matters, including Republicans’ proposal to give corporations federal liability immunity during the pandemic. We negotiated on this issue for weeks, and my Democratic colleagues and I put forward a variety of alternative proposals. Unfortunately, we have not been able to reach an agreement.

“I’m also disappointed that we weren’t able to agree on including much-needed funding for states and localities in the larger bipartisan package. I want to be clear: I’m not giving up on funding for states and localities. This funding is essential in our fight against the pandemic and for our economic recovery.

“While the fight continues over these issues, we must provide some emergency relief for the American people before we go home for the holidays. I support the \$748 billion bipartisan package. I urge my colleagues to support this package, and I call on the Senate Majority Leader to bring it to the floor for a vote this week.”

If enacted, the \$748 billion bipartisan COVID-19 emergency relief legislation would include the following priorities for Illinois:

- Extend unemployment benefits for 16 weeks, including for about 145,000 Illinoisans claiming Pandemic Unemployment Assistance and 231,000 Illinoisans claiming Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation;
- Provide assistance for small businesses, including a second round of Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loans for hardest-hit businesses;
- Extend the eviction moratorium through January 31, 2021, and provide emergency rental assistance to help keep families in their homes, at a time when one-fifth of Illinois renters report being behind on rent payments;
- Provide funding for hospitals and clinics for testing and to quickly and fairly distribute vaccines, including approximately \$500 million to Illinois for testing and vaccine distribution and \$1.5 billion for Illinois hospitals and health providers;
- Provides \$82 billion nationwide for education, including \$54 billion for K-12 and \$20 billion for higher education;
- Extends federal student loan forbearance from the current expiration date of January 31, 2021, through April 30, 2021;
- Provides \$10 billion nationwide in much needed support to the struggling child care sector;

- Address hunger by increasing SNAP benefits for nearly two million individuals in Illinois, and by providing funding for food banks and senior nutrition programs, which serve more than 1.5 million people in Illinois.
- Provide hundreds of millions in funding for Illinois transit agencies;
- Provide millions in funding for Illinois airports;
- Provide more than \$1 billion in funding for Amtrak to prevent further furloughs and service reductions;
- Provide millions in payroll support to protect the jobs of thousands of Illinois airline workers; and,
- Provide funding to help struggling Illinois bus companies keep their workers on the job.

The package also includes \$300 million in funding for the National Health Service Corps and Nurse Corps to implement Durbin's bipartisan legislation—*Strengthening America's Healthcare Workforce Act*—which addresses health workforce shortages and racial and ethnic health disparities by increasing the number of doctors and nurses, including from underrepresented populations, providing care in underserved urban and rural communities.