

Durbin, Collins Applaud Senate Passage Of Siren Reauthorization Act

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WASHINGTON – U.S. Senate Majority Whip Dick Durbin (D-IL) and U.S. Senator Susan Collins (R-ME), a member of the U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP), applauded Senate passage of their bipartisan [SIREN Reauthorization Act](#). The legislation would extend funding for five additional years for *SIREN Act* grants to rural fire and EMS agencies nationwide. The funding from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), which was created through Durbin’s *Supporting and Improving Rural EMS Needs (SIREN) Act*, supports EMS agencies in training and recruiting staff, conducting certification courses, and purchasing equipment, including naloxone to address the opioid overdose epidemic.

“In Illinois, rural EMS agencies are a lifeline for their communities. These first responders are on the front lines, and we must ensure that they have the proper staffing, training, and equipment to address the emergency in front of them,” said Durbin. “I worked in 2018 to pass the bipartisan *SIREN Act* to meet the needs of rural EMS agencies as they care for their communities. And today, I’m pleased that the United States Senate has recognized the importance of this successful program by advancing the *SIREN Reauthorization Act*. I’m grateful for Senator Collins’ partnership in making certain that rural EMS agencies continue to have access to the funding they depend on. I urge the House of Representatives to quickly take up and pass this legislation so it can be signed into law.”

“It is vital that Americans who live in rural parts of Maine and across the country have access to lifesaving emergency medical services, which is why I have long advocated for funding to support access to quality rural health care,” said Collins. “With the Senate passage of this legislation, we are supporting rural EMS agencies, this bipartisan legislation would help to alleviate staffing shortages, upgrade training and equipment, and ultimately boost response times when seconds count. This program has made a real difference for recruiting and retaining EMS personnel in Maine’s rural communities.”

The bipartisan bill was initially signed into law in 2018 as part of the Farm Bill. Since then, Durbin and Collins have led the appropriations effort to grow the program from \$5 million annually to \$10.5 million this year, resulting in a total of nearly \$30 million in grants nationwide. The *SIREN Act* has resulted in new funds to rural EMS/fire agencies in Nauvoo, Amboy, Jerseyville, and Gibson City, Illinois. Thanks to *SIREN Act* funding, the Nauvoo Fire Protection District has been able to increase the number of annual calls it responds to across Hancock County, Illinois, from 140 to 360.

A decline in primary care and hospital service availability, workforce shortages exacerbated by the pandemic, great distances between health care facilities, and low insurance reimbursement for transport and emergency treatment have all strained rural EMS agencies. At the same time, EMS agencies today are tasked with ever-greater responsibilities—preparing for natural and manmade disasters and bioterror threats, supporting the chronic and emergency care needs of an aging population, and responding on the front lines of the opioid epidemic. These first responders are often the only health care providers in their area and face difficulty in personnel recruitment and retention, and securing expensive equipment.

The *SIREN Reauthorization Act* is endorsed by the National Association of Emergency Medical Technicians, International Association of Fire Fighters, International Association of Fire Chiefs, National Rural Health Association, National Volunteer Fire Council, and National Fire Protection Association.

