

Congress Takes Action on COVID-19, But More Action Is Needed to Fund the Front Lines



Over the past month, Congress has passed three relief packages designed to address issues caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Though these packages offer some relief, we have work to do to ensure that front line services are fully funded and working families get the support they need.

Federal Legislation Passed:

The Families First Coronavirus Response Act, signed into law on March 18, makes progress toward giving workers and families the support they need.

Key provisions of this law include:

- **New Federal Medicaid Funds:** \$36 billion in new federal funds to help states respond to increasing public health needs.
- **COVID-19 Testing:** the law requires COVID-19 testing to be covered at no cost.
- **Unemployment Insurance (UI) Support:** Makes \$1 billion available to help states staff up and get UI benefits out the door.
- **Increase Access to Food Assistance:** Provides emergency SNAP assistance to families and expands federal support for other food programs.

- **Limited Emergency Paid Leave:** Mandates that all public employers and businesses with <500 employees provide two weeks of emergency paid sick leave and up to 10 more weeks of emergency family medical leave.

Though this was a critical first step, the Families First Coronavirus Response Act was inadequate to address the scope of the problem. Workers began mobilizing immediately for stronger supports.

Our advocacy paid off with the passage of the CARES Act, which included direct funding for families and investments in the stability of state and local governments and our health care system.

The CARES Act includes:

- **Recovery Rebates for Individuals:** Provides up to \$1,200 (\$2,400 for couples) and an additional \$500 per child to families with an income lower than \$75,000 (\$150,000 married).
- **Direct Grants to State and Local Governments:** Provides \$150 billion in grants to state, tribal and local governments through a Coronavirus Relief Fund.

- **Federal Reserve Support for Municipal Bond Liquidity:** Establishes a loan program capitalized by \$454 billion for states and municipalities, as well as businesses.
- **Health Care Facilities:** Appropriates \$1.32 billion for detection, prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of COVID19.
- **Student Loan Deferment:** defers student loan payments, principal, and interest for 6 months.
- **Extends Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)** and related programs through November 30, 2020.

Next Steps:

Our advocacy work is not done. Right now, Congress is negotiating the fourth COVID response package. Your union family needs your help to make sure this bill puts workers first.

AFSCME members need solutions now. **The COVID 4 package must include:**

- **More support for state and local governments:** State and local governments will face budget shortfalls at a time when the public needs services more than ever. The next bill must provide \$300 billion in direct, unrestricted funds for state and local governments.
- **More education aid funding:** \$175 billion in additional education aid is necessary.
- **More federal Medicaid funding (FMAP):** though previous bills boosted FMAP, more is necessary to ensure states can fund rising Medicaid caseloads.
- **Coverage for COVID-related health care:** The federal government should backstop COVID coverage and help with laid off workers' COBRA premiums.

(Continued on page 2)

(Continued from page 1)

- **Investment in infrastructure:**
 A robust infrastructure plan will create jobs to facilitate economic recovery and address substantial needs. The plan must ensure that publicly financed infrastructure is publicly owned.
- **Close loopholes in paid leave coverage:** the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (COVID 2) allows US Department of Labor to exclude workers from receiving the emergency leave they need. Congress must address this and other shortcomings.

Take Action:

Call your members of Congress and Senators Smith and Klobuchar TODAY and ask them to **make sure that the COVID 4 relief package funds the front lines and puts workers first.** Find contact information and a call script at afscmemn.org/call-action.

Council 5 Endorses Labor Champions for MN Senate, County Boards

Elections are a critical part of our strategy to advance worker power, and democracy must continue while we adjust to a new reality.

Your AFSCME Council 5 PEOPLE Committees endorsed the following candidates for the 2020 election:

Minnesota State Senate:

- District 11: Michelle Lee
- District 47: Adeline Miller

Hennepin County Board of Commissioners:

- District 1: De'Vonna Pittman
- District 6: Chris LaTondresse

St Louis County Board of Commissioners:

- District 2: Patrick Boyle
- District 3: Ashley Grimm

Campaigning in a pandemic is very difficult, and our endorsed candidates need all the support we can offer. Check our endorsements page at afscmemn.org/election-endorsements-0 to find the endorsed candidates in your area. Please consider donating to their campaigns and reaching out to learn about volunteer opportunities. Many candidates are hosting tele-town halls and online trainings.

When we have more details about the logistics of the 2020 election, we will share them with you here and on our website at afscmemn.org.

Social Distancing is Working - We Must Stay the Course

This week, Governor Walz announced Executive Order 20-33, which extends

the Stay Home Order until May 4. EO 20-33 also extends the closure of bars, restaurants, and other public venues through 11:59 pm on May 3.

Data shows that **Minnesota's commitment to social distancing is already slowing the spread of COVID-19**, giving the state critical time to prepare. By extending the Stay at Home order and ensuring that large gathering places stay closed, the state can continue to build hospital capacity and secure the medical equipment patients and their care providers will need in the months ahead. Staying home is a life-saving act!

Beyond all these important reasons, the Stay at Home order will reduce exposure to the front line staff - many of whom are AFSCME members - who cannot stay home from their essential jobs. We are grateful that Governor Walz takes the risk of this virus seriously and continues to make decisions that protect our front-line members.

The data is clear: social distancing is working. We are flattening the curve and reducing the potentially devastating impact of this pandemic. Though it is difficult, we can take comfort in the fact that are all in this together. Now, we must stay the course and maintain social distance as much as possible. Together, we will defeat this disease.

Resources for Members

These days, things are changing fast. Stay up to date on all the latest news by following @afscmemn5 on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Get new guidance and resources at afscmemn.org under the COVID-19 tab. We encourage all members to widely share the resources we have put on our website and social media.

Look for action alerts via email and text so you know when to take action to protect working families. We are all in this together. Your union family deeply cares about all of you.

Stay home except for essential needs

#StayHomeMN

Extended until May 4

STAY HOME | STOP THE SPREAD | SAVE LIVES

m MINNESOTA | #StayHomeMN | mn.gov/covid19

Governor Walz extended Minnesota's Stay at Home order until May 4. You can help spread awareness by sharing the #StayHomeMN campaign on social media!