

Talking points for NACo COVID-19 updates

2nd national call 3.19.20

President Borgeson gives opening welcome

Legislative efforts

- Thanks for joining us—we are doing everything we can to keep you updated on federal action and provide resources for your efforts.
- If you have any questions during the call, please submit them to research@naco.org
- Just as things are rapidly developing in each of your counties, we've seen pretty rapid developments over the last week at the federal level as Congress and the White House have moved quickly to pass 2 bipartisan packages to address the surging coronavirus epidemic in the United States.
- To summarize what has been accomplished so far:

1st Supplemental Package

- On March 6, President Trump signed the first, \$8.3 billion emergency supplemental appropriations package (P.L. 116-123) that includes comprehensive resources to enhance the national response to coronavirus, as well as key provisions to support state and local efforts to address cases of the illness.
- As passed, the legislation specifically included:

1. \$2.2 billion in public health funding to support prevention, preparedness and response efforts, including a \$1 billion set-aside for State and Local Public Health Emergency Preparedness (PHEP) grants to support states, counties, cities and tribes, half of which will be distributed within 30 days.

Under this provision, each state will receive at least \$4 million in PHEP grants. For county administered public health authorities, we strongly encourage county officials to work closely with state public health offices on the timing and requirements for sub-allocation and use of these funds.

2. \$3 billion in funding for research and development of coronavirus vaccines and diagnostic tools, and \$100 million in supplemental appropriations for Community Health Centers (CHC).

3. \$3.1 billion in funding will support the Public Health and Social Services Emergency Fund under the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response.
- A portion of those funds have already been released, and at least half of all funds are expected to be released within 30 days of the bill enactment which was March 6

2nd Package

- Just yesterday, a **second** legislative package called the *Families First Coronavirus Response Act*, was passed and signed by the president and is aimed at providing support for coronavirus response efforts,
- It specifically focuses support in four key areas including:
 1. Free coronavirus testing for all individuals, regardless of whether they are insured
 2. \$1 billion in nutrition assistance for low-income mothers and pregnant women, support for food banks and meals for seniors; this measure also protects students' access to school meals in the event of school closures
 3. Increases federal contributions to Medicaid- which includes a bump in the Federal medical assistance percentage, or FMAP helping states and counties meet increased need for Medicaid-covered services
 4. Unemployment assistance – offers \$1 billion in emergency grants for FY 2020 for states to process and pay unemployment insurance (UI) benefits
- This passage came after some technical corrections were made on the bill language over the weekend around a few items including:
 1. Clarity around the Medicaid federal contributions provision that expands state eligibility for FMAP increases.
 2. While the new measure would still provide two weeks of sick leave to a wide swath of workers affected by the pandemic **the 10 weeks paid leave would be limited only to workers caring for a child whose school or day care had been**

shut. Health-care providers and emergency responders, as well as workers who had been in quarantine or caring for a family member affected by the virus are NOT eligible for the **additional 10 weeks of leave.**

Given these limitations, Senator Patty Murray is leading a standalone bill entitled “Paid Sick Days for Public Health Emergencies and Personal and Family Care Act” bill number S.3415, which expands the availability of paid sick leave to employees.

And while we appreciate that this package expands paid leave benefits for workers affected by COVID-19, the legislation imposes substantial new sick leave and family medical leave requirements on government employers of all sizes. We are requesting that language is inserted to clarify that state and local government employers fully qualify for both paid FMLA and sick leave credits to help us fulfill this bill’s mandate.

Presidential Declaration of National Emergency

- Separately, this past Friday the President declared a national emergency
- The declaration would release approximately \$50 billion of dollars in relief funding and will begin the process under which state and local governments can get access to federal dollars as you continue response efforts.
- Most of the disaster assistance funds will be made available from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) through the Disaster Relief Fund, with the bulk of the money being used to reimburse state and local governments during disaster relief efforts such as this one.
- *We are pleased to report that NACo now has greater clarity on the FEMA process for public assistance for states, local governments and eligible nonprofits.*
- *State, Territorial, Tribal, local government entities and certain private non-profit (PNP) organizations are eligible to apply for Public Assistance. States, Tribal and Territorial governments do not need to request separate emergency declarations to receive FEMA assistance under this nationwide declaration. The emergency declaration will reimburse for eligible emergency protective measures taken to respond to the COVID-19 emergency*

at the direction or guidance of public health officials under Category B of FEMA's Public Assistance program.

- *We are happy to be joined by federal partners who will provide updates and additional information in just a few minutes*

Now Congress has quickly shifted gears towards a 3rd Package

- They hope to complete it over the weekend and is said to be in the trillions.
- Today, Leader McConnell laid out the FOUR PART Senate GOP Phase 3 plan which he said will focus on:
 1. New federally guaranteed loans. A rapid injection of cash for small business.
 2. Direct financial help for Americans. Senate Republicans want to put cash in the hands of Americans, money for people, from the middle class on down PERIOD.
 3. Targeted lending to industries of national importance. None of these firms brought this on themselves, we're talking about loans that must be repaid.
 4. Health of the American People. Remove barriers to care, speed up innovation, fund hospitals and health centers that will treat patients, and expand access to the tools they need including respirator masks.
- So moving forward, we need your help to reach out to your members of Congress and work to get several key county priorities included in this next package:

Strengthening the Local Health Care Safety Net- As the local health care system works to provide care for infected residents regardless of socioeconomic status, we are urging Congress to make direct investments in county health departments and local governments, and to repeal or delay the statutory Medicaid disproportionate share hospital (DSH) payment reductions as these payments are a critical means for local hospitals to serve our nation's most vulnerable citizens by enabling them to make up for those losses and continue to provide high-quality care to all patients.

Deploying More Testing Equipment: Counties need sustained federal investments and flexibility at the local level to help us protect our residents from the spread of

this virus and lessen the impact of this pandemic on our local communities. Local governments cannot adequately respond to the threat of the virus without the essential tools required to measure the spread of the disease in our communities. The shortage of test availability, and the lack of testing has contributed to a false sense of security in states and counties where there are currently no reported cases. We urge Congress to increase the availability of testing materials, and grant flexibility to state and local governments so that we can quickly identify and treat individuals impacted by COVID-19. Furthermore, counties request that any future legislative packages include adequate funding to address lab capacity issues and provide adequate technical support and equipment to meet growing demands for testing.

Increase the access and Distribution of Personal Protective Equipment for Essential County Service Providers: As you all know, the protection of our local service providers is crucial. Without adequate equipment needed to prevent personal contamination, local health care professionals cannot administer tests and treat infected individuals. In highly impacted areas, counties have seen a spike of local service provider infections, and in some cases, providers have refused to provide services due to the lack of protective equipment. We request additional personal protective equipment for both county and private facilities be made available to preserve the health and safety of these essential employees when their services are needed most.

Clarify Tax Credits for Paid Sick and Paid Family and Medical Leave for County Employers: Paid leave is a significant challenge for county governments who employ over 3.6 million, or one percent, of all Americans. While we appreciate that H.R. 6201 expands paid leave benefits for workers affected by COVID-19, the legislation imposes substantial new sick leave and family medical leave requirements on government employers of all sizes. Counties request that language is inserted to clarify that state and local government employers fully qualify for both paid sick leave and FMLA tax credits.

NACo Advocacy Resources

- Our NACo team has done analysis of both packages that have moved as well as the disaster declaration and those are available online. We also have a template letter you can send to your members of Congress available.

Other NACo Resources

- NACo has been tracking county actions, like emergency declarations and shelter-in-place policies, through our County Explorer tool. You can find the map on our COVID-19 webpage at www.naco.org/coronavirus. We are crowdsourcing information for this map and constantly updating it, so if you don't see your county's latest actions listed, please send us information, and if possible, an official press release or other official document.
- So far, we have mapped almost 400 county emergency declarations, and we just updated the map to include shelter-in-place policies also, so our members and partners can see how counties in different parts of the country are responding to this pandemic.
- If you want to share your local actions with us, or have any other COVID-19 information or any questions we can help answer, you can email the research team at research@naco.org and they will make sure your question gets to the right person on our team.

INTRODUCE:

Traci Basher, Acting Public Assistance Division Director in our Office of Response and Recovery will join the call.