



COALITION ON HUMAN NEEDS

The Human Needs Report

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COVID-19 Congressional Response Packages: What's Passed, and What Advocates are Fighting for Next

Congress has already passed four bills to respond to the coronavirus pandemic and resulting fallout, but advocates are united in saying more must be done.

The first bill, the [Coronavirus Preparedness and Response Supplemental Appropriations Act](#), was signed into law on March 6. The \$8.3 billion emergency supplemental spending bill was passed to help government health officials with research and purchases of medications for treatments and vaccines.

The approximately \$190 billion [Families First Coronavirus Response Act](#), signed into law on March 18, contained provisions to provide free COVID-19 testing, increased federal funds to support state Medicaid costs, some increase in [nutrition assistance](#), expanded [unemployment insurance](#) (UI) compensation, and [paid leave and paid sick days](#) for millions of workers. See [this summary](#) from the House Appropriations Committee for more information.

The \$2.3 trillion [Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security \(CARES\) Act](#), signed into law on March 27, contained provisions to provide funding to health care providers and researchers; one-time income assistance (known as Economic Impact Payments or Recovery Rebates) to individuals with incomes under \$99,000; \$15.5 billion more for SNAP to cover the projected increase in applications and the costs of relief authorized in the Families First Act; nearly \$900 billion in loans, grants, and tax credits to businesses; further expansion of UI compensation; [\\$3.5 billion for child care](#); \$150 billion in general grants for state, local, tribal and territorial aid; \$31 billion for education assistance; and \$400 million to facilitate voting by mail efforts. The bill also included [\\$12 billion in housing and homelessness resources](#) and placed limited moratoriums on evictions and foreclosures, covering property with any federal funding or backing. For more information on the CARES Act, see [this detailed analysis](#) from CHN, as well as summaries from Senate Appropriations Committee [Republicans](#) and [Democrats](#).

For more on both the CARES Act and the Families First Act, see this [captioned webinar and slides](#) from CHN.

The latest package, the [Paycheck Protection Program and Health Care Enhancement Act](#), was signed into law on April 24. Sometimes referred to as COVID Package 3.5 because it carried a smaller price tag and was in large part aimed at adding more funds to the oversubscribed small business loans in the CARES Act, the \$483 billion package provided about \$310 billion more for the Paycheck Protection Program loans to help businesses keep some workers employed, as well as roughly \$75 billion for hospitals and other health care providers and \$25 billion for expanded COVID-19 testing, including funds to cover tests for those without health insurance. For more information, see summaries from the [House Appropriations Committee](#) and the [House Small Business Committee](#).

However, even with the advances these bills made, advocates believe more needs to be done to address both the country's economic recovery and provide immediate and longer-term support to those whose needs were left out or not adequately addressed in the previous packages. Advocates believe the next package (sometimes referred to COVID Package 4 or CARES 2) needs to include a number of important pieces to ensure medical treatment and protection is provided for everyone, support the incomes of struggling people, and shore up state and local institutions.

Provisions that advocates are pushing for related to these needs include, but are not limited to:

- *Health care*: expand health coverage for the uninsured; ensure free COVID-19 treatment for all; more funding for poor and rural hospitals
- *Aid to states, localities, tribes, and territories*: [additional funds with fewer restrictions](#) to prevent disastrous budget cuts; an additional increase in [federal Medicaid funds](#) (known as FMAP) for states; additional funds for Puerto Rico and other territories; additional funds for the District of Columbia, which was treated like a territory instead of a state in terms of federal aid in the CARES Act. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said last week that state and local governments could need nearly \$1 trillion in additional aid over the next three to four years to cope with the pandemic, with additional money for Medicaid and other expenses needed on top of that.
- *Cash assistance*: additional stimulus payments to individuals, including immigrants, children over 17, and other low-income people who were left out last time, and with an easier delivery

system that doesn't create barriers to accessing it; [expansion of the Earned Income Tax Credit and Child Tax Credit](#) to provide assistance down the road

- *Housing and homelessness*: additional funds to prevent homelessness and ensure housing stability, including [\\$100 billion](#) in emergency rental assistance and eviction prevention
- *Additional aid for workers*: expanded and extended unemployment insurance; proper protective equipment and [OSHA safety requirements](#); expanded [paid sick days and sick leave](#) to cover all workers; [\\$50 billion](#) in additional aid for child care
- *Nutrition assistance*: an increase to the [maximum SNAP benefit](#) by 15 percent and an increase to the minimum monthly SNAP benefit to \$30; expansion and extension of child nutrition programs; additional nutrition assistance for [Puerto Rico](#)
- *Other*: expanded [consumer protections](#) and [nondiscrimination protections](#); expanded broadband internet access for underserved communities; COVID-19 demographic data collection; allowing voting by mail in elections.
- For more on what CHN believes should be in the next package, click [here](#) and [here](#).

While the Senate is returning to DC this week, the House has not yet announced when it will be back in session. While work on this next package continues, a timeline for passage is uncertain. Senate Majority Leader McConnell has talked about a “go-slow” approach to any new legislation, and has also urged protection for businesses from lawsuits related to COVID-19 as a top priority for any new package. Democrats have opposed that emphasis, and have focused on the need for state and local aid and more help for individuals as unemployment surges. The Trump Administration has voiced a willingness to consider more aid to individuals, but President Trump has [recently resumed demands](#) that any new package include a payroll tax cut, which Democrats and economists have opposed as ineffectual stimulus that would undermine the stability of Social Security funding if its reduced revenues were not replaced from the general fund. For many more resources, including statements from many of CHN's members on the legislation that has passed and on their priorities for additional action, see CHN's COVID-19 resource page [here](#).

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FY21 Appropriations Season Has Started, but the Path Forward is Murky

While most eyes around Washington and the country are focused on COVID-19, congressional appropriations staffers continue to work on Fiscal Year 2021 spending bills. In early April, House Appropriations Chair Nita Lowey (D-NY) distributed preliminary top-line spending limits to the 12 House Appropriations Subcommittees that will be used as guidance to draft their respective spending bills. These allocations (known as 302(b) allocations) have not yet been made public. The House Appropriations Committee had previously planned to begin marking up its 12 annual funding bills on April 21, but with Congress away from the Capitol, that did not happen.

One challenge for this year is the limited funding due to topline spending caps enacted as part of the bipartisan budget deal Congress passed last July. In total, Congress will have \$10 billion more in FY21

base discretionary dollars to work with than it did in FY20; \$5 billion more for defense and \$5 billion more for nondefense programs. This total does not include some funding, like some emergency disaster aid and war funding, that Congress approves outside of the caps.

Even before the coronavirus pandemic hit, advocates were concerned that the \$5 billion increase for nondefense programs will be entirely consumed by rising costs in veterans' health care, leading to flat funding or even cuts in other human needs programs. With the need for continued increased funding to respond to the pandemic and resulting economic recession, advocates are seeking to move some of the veterans' health care services outside the cap, and to add emergency titles to all 12 appropriations bills, which would allow for additional spending outside of the caps. If Congress cannot find more flexibility in domestic funding, it is likely that many programs will suffer severe cuts and many services will further erode.

In April, nearly 400 groups, including the Coalition on Human Needs, urged leading appropriators in Congress to allocate a greater share of funds in fiscal year 2021 to programs controlled by the departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education. In a [letter](#) sent to the Chair and Vice Chair of the Senate Appropriations Committee and the Chair and Ranking Member of the House Appropriations Committee, the groups noted that the programs funded by the Labor-HHS-Education Subcommittee affect health and well-being, child development, educational and skills attainment. Yet these programs largely have been [shortchanged in the appropriations process over the last decade](#).

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2020 Census Operations Delayed; Advocates Fear Impact on Redistricting, Minority Representation

The Census Bureau in April announced it is requesting Congress delay for four months its deadline for reporting census data that will be used in 2021 and beyond to draw political boundaries at the local, state, and congressional level. Congressional approval for the change in deadline is required, and could be included in the next coronavirus response package.

The current deadline for reporting data is Dec. 31. However, acknowledging the effect that the coronavirus pandemic has had on data collection, the Census Bureau requested that the deadline be extended to April 30, 2021. The Bureau also announced that it will begin opening its field offices sometime after June 1, and will extend the deadline for collecting household data from Aug. 15 to Oct. 31.

[According to the New York Times](#), a four-month delay would mean that states will not get the final data they need for redistricting until July 31, 2021 – long after some states have adjourned their legislative sessions.

This could cause problems, the newspaper reports. Some states have fixed deadlines to approve political maps – deadlines that in some cases are even written into their state constitutions. This has sparked

fears that some states could use other data besides that provided by the Census Bureau for political apportionment.

The U.S. Constitution requires states to use census data for drawing political districts. But courts have left the door open for states to use different population figures to draw maps. Republicans in some states have floated the idea of excluding noncitizens from counts or only include registered voters. While either approach would invite heated court challenges, any successful effort to redistrict this way would result in disenfranchising minority voters and diluting their representation.

Advocates for a fair and accurate 2020 Census still do not know if the Census Bureau will need additional funds to carry out its mandate in light of the coronavirus pandemic. The Bureau expects to spend \$1.5 billion more on advertising and on census field staff – “enumerators” – because of the shift in timeline. It has \$2 billion in contingency funds and as of now is not requesting additional funds beyond this from Congress, but advocates and some in Congress are skeptical that the \$2 billion will cover those additional expenses with enough available if other emergencies unrelated to the coronavirus should arise.

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