

# Milwaukee Ald. Lewis: Statement on COVID-19 relief package before Congress

Posted on Tuesday, Dec 22, 2020

>> **WisPolitics is now on the State Affairs network. Get custom keyword notifications, bill tracking and all WisPolitics content. [Get the app or access via desktop.](#)**

The \$900 billion COVID-19 relief stimulus package that could be approved by both houses of Congress today is massive – second only to the CARES Act stimulus package approved earlier this year to help individuals, businesses and governments weather the deadly COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic.

While I am very disappointed that the package will not provide funding to help state and local governments, I am bolstered by several specific parts of the bill that I believe will greatly help all Milwaukeeans and many small business owners:

- **Global Health Package:** Democrats secured essential funding for vaccine procurement and distribution, providing roughly \$20 billion to BARDA for procurement of vaccines and therapeutics, nearly \$9 billion to the CDC and states for vaccine distribution and more than \$3 billion for the strategic national stockpile. **This includes \$300 million specifically directed to high risk and underserved areas for distribution, including communities of color.**

The bill provides more than \$22 billion, all sent directly to states, for testing, tracing and COVID mitigation programs. Of this total, \$2.5 billion will be sent out as grants specifically **targeted at needs in underserved areas, including both communities of color and rural communities.**

Democrats also secured \$4.5 billion in mental health funding, \$9 billion in support for health care providers, and more than \$1 billion for NIH to research COVID-19.

- **Ends surprise health care billing:** The package includes bipartisan legislation that will end surprise billing for emergency and scheduled care. No more massive bills that could force families and/or individuals to declare bankruptcy.

## **COVID-19 Relief Package/ADD ONE**

• **Enhanced Unemployment Benefits:** Democrats successfully fought to bring back the enhanced federal unemployment insurance bump, which expired in July. The relief bill provides an additional \$300 per week for all workers receiving unemployment benefits, through March 14, 2021. The bill also extends the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) program, with expanded coverage to the self-employed, gig workers, and others in non-traditional employment, and the Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation (PEUC) program, which provides additional weeks of federally-funded unemployment benefits to individuals who exhaust their regular state benefits. The extension was critical in preventing as many as 14 million Americans from losing this economic lifeline at the end of the year. Additionally, the bill increases the maximum number of weeks an individual may claim benefits through regular state unemployment plus the PEUC program, or through the PUA program, to 50 weeks. The bill also provides an extra benefit of \$100 per week for certain workers who have both wage and self-employment income but whose base UI benefit calculation doesn't take their self-employment into account.

• **Strong support for small business:** Democrats secured **critical funding and policy changes to help small businesses, including minority-owned businesses**, and nonprofits recover from the pandemic. The relief bill includes more than \$284 billion for first and second forgivable Payroll Protection Program (PPP) loans, expanded PPP eligibility for nonprofits and local newspapers, TV and radio broadcasters, key modifications to PPP to serve the smallest businesses and struggling non-profits and better assist independent restaurants, and includes \$15 billion in dedicated funding for live venues, independent movie theaters, and cultural institutions. The agreement also includes \$20 billion for targeted EIDL

Grants which are critical to many smaller neighborhood businesses.

- **Broadband access:** The agreement invests \$7 billion to increase access to broadband, including a new Emergency Broadband Benefit to help millions of students, families and unemployed workers afford the broadband they need during the pandemic.

Again, although I strongly believe the package does NOT go far enough in many areas, I am hopeful and optimistic that it can provide at least some of the long-awaited relief many individuals and small businesses are in dire need of right now.