

U.S. Sen. Baldwin: Urges Senate to reject conditioning federal funds to schools on re-opening in-person

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WASHINGTON, D.C. - U.S. Senator Tammy Baldwin, along with 29 of her Senate colleagues, today urged Senate leadership to reject the Trump Administration's desire to condition education funds in the next coronavirus relief package on the reopening of elementary and secondary schools for in-person instruction. In a letter led by Dick Durbin (D-IL) to Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY), Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY), Appropriations Committee Chairman Richard Shelby (R-AL), and Appropriations Vice Chairman Patrick Leahy (D-VT), the Senators said that the Senate should not be complicit in President Trump's demands that would risk the health and lives of students and school personnel, and that Congress should instead provide federal assistance to schools in need and support for local officials to base reopening decisions on facts and science.

“Instead, Congress should provide federal assistance to elementary and secondary schools that gives state and local officials the tools and resources they need to ensure a safe and effective learning environment for students, including students from low-income families and students of color, and a safe and effective working environment for educators and staff—whether it be in-person, remote, or a hybrid model,” the Senators wrote. **“Every one of us wants schools to reopen when it is safe to do so. But, facts and science must drive those decisions, not Presidential pipedreams or impatience.”**

The Senate Republican proposal, unveiled this week by McConnell, would provide only \$70 billion to elementary and secondary education - with an estimated two-thirds of that federal funding held hostage unless schools reopen to in-person

learning. Durbin and other Senate Democrats, led by Senator Patty Murray of Washington, have proposed the *Coronavirus Child Care and Education Relief Act*, which would provide \$175 billion to elementary and secondary education without regard to the operating status of schools.

In addition to Baldwin and Durbin, the letter was signed by Senators Jack Reed (D-RI), Chris Van Hollen (D-MD), Tim Kaine (D-VA), Ron Wyden (D-OR), Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI), Elizabeth Warren (D-MA), Bob Casey (D-PA), Dianne Feinstein (D-CA), Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), Mark Warner (D-VA), Sherrod Brown (D-OH), Kamala Harris (D-CA), Jeff Merkley (D-OR), Mazie Hirono (D-HI), Tammy Duckworth (D-IL), Ed Markey (D-MA), Debbie Stabenow (D_MI), Brian Schatz (D-HI), Tina Smith (D-MN), Amy Klobuchar (D-MN), Cory Booker (D-NJ), Michael Bennet (D-CO), Catherine Cortez Masto (D-NV), Jacky Rosen (D-NV), Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY), Bernie Sanders (I-VT), Ben Cardin (D-MD), and Gary Peters (D-MI).

The full text of the letter is below and [here](#):

July 31, 2020

Dear Leader McConnell, Leader Schumer, Chairman Shelby, and Vice Chairman Leahy:

We write to oppose conditioning education funds in the next coronavirus relief package on the reopening of elementary and secondary schools for in-person instruction.

Over the course of the summer, a national debate has raged over the operating status of elementary and secondary schools this fall. During this time, state and local school leaders have been desperately seeking additional federal financial assistance and clear, scientifically-based federal guidance to support reopening schools safely in-person this fall.

Instead, the Republican-controlled Senate has failed to act on any major new coronavirus relief legislation since March. For his part, President Trump has threatened to withhold federal funds from schools that don't reopen in person while trying to politically influence the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) school reopening guidance. Meanwhile, COVID-19 cases are surging throughout the country—with records for new infections being broken almost daily , deaths rising , and no end in sight.

With months wasted and without taking responsibility for his own failure of leadership that contributed to the recent surge in cases—President Trump continues to demand that schools reopen for in-person instruction at any cost in just a few short weeks. Congress should not be complicit in the President's dangerous game that would risk the health and lives of students and school personnel for an empty talking point. America's schoolchildren and educators are not the President's sacrificial lambs—to be used to claim a false victory over the, still, out of control virus months before an election. Congress must reject any effort to condition federal assistance on schools reopening in person.

Instead, Congress should provide federal assistance to elementary and secondary schools that gives state and local officials the tools and resources they need to ensure a safe and effective learning environment for students, including students from low-income families and students of color, and a safe and effective working environment for educators and staff—whether it be in-person, remote, or a hybrid model. The Coronavirus Child Care and Education Relief Act (S. 4112) would do that by providing an additional \$175 billion in assistance to elementary and secondary schools without regard to the operating status of schools and school districts. It also includes an additional \$30 billion to help communities disproportionately impacted by this crisis, students with disabilities, and students struggling without access to internet and technology.

Every one of us wants schools to reopen when it is safe to do so. But, facts and science must drive those decisions, not Presidential pipedreams or impatience. Thank you.

Sincerely,

An online version of this release is available [here](#).