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Families First Coronavirus Response Act (HR 6201)

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On March 12, the [Families First Coronavirus Response Act](#) was introduced in the House to provide additional funding and authority to respond to the coronavirus pandemic and support households facing economic hardship as a result of the virus. The legislative proposal includes a number of proposed policies and appropriations that would aide state and local human service agency response to emerging needs in their communities.

NUTRITION SUPPORTS

- 1. SNAP Benefits** - The bill provides added flexibility and funding to use SNAP benefits to meet emerging needs in the community.
 - *SNAP Benefits Due to School Closures* – Provides Congressional authority for states to issue temporary SNAP benefits to households with children eligible for free or reduced school meals if schools are closed for a period longer than five days. Affected areas have a public health emergency declaration and an approved State agency plan.
 - *Waives SNAP Work Requirements* – Temporarily waives work requirements in areas with a public health emergency designation.
 - *Adds Flexibility in SNAP Administration* – Provides flexibility for states to issue emergency allotments to SNAP recipients to address temporary food needs and to adjust benefit issuance methods based on circumstances on the ground.
- 2. Additional Nutrition Programs** - The bill provides additional funding for nutritional supports and codifies strategies to serve children and seniors in non-congregate settings.
 - *Emergency Funding for WIC and Commodity Assistance Program* – Appropriates \$500 million to the Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) and \$400 million to the Commodity Assistance Program.
 - *Codifies Meal Service in Non-Congregate Settings* – Builds off recent USDA guidance to permit child and adult care centers to seek alternatives to traditional congregate settings for providing meals to individuals in the Child and Adult Care Food Program and authorizes USDA to waive nutritional content requirements if necessary to provide meals due to a supply chain disruption.

The American Public Human Services Association advances the well-being of all people by influencing modern approaches to sound policy, building the capacity of public agencies to enable healthy families and communities, and connecting leaders to accelerate learning and generate practical solutions together.

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- *Waives Cost Neutrality Requirements for School Meals Waivers* – Exempts waiver requests to the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act from cost neutrality requirements.
- *Funds Aging and Disability Service Programs* – Appropriates \$250 million for home-delivered nutrition services (\$160 million), congregate nutrition services (\$80 million), and nutrition services for Native Americans (\$10 million).

MEDICAL ASSISTANCE

1. **Enhanced Medicaid FMAP** – Allows for a temporary increase in the Federal medical assistance percentage (FMAP) match by eight percent for each quarter during a COVID-19-related public health emergency.
2. **Diagnostic Testing** – Ensures that all testing of COVID-19 be free to those being tested, whether they be covered by private or public health insurance, or do not have health insurance. Both Medicaid and CHIP would be tested under no cost-share, but if the state plan includes cost-share, they must submit a State Plan Amendment to change this. The bill requires the National Disaster Medical System to reimburse laboratories for testing in those without health coverage. The bill does not address any treatment costs.

LABOR

1. **Paid Sick Leave** - Requires employers to offer at least 7 paid sick days to their employees and creates a new federal paid sick leave benefits program to extend emergency leave pay to an additional 14 paid days during the event of any public health emergency (including the current COVID-19 crisis), and \$5 million is appropriated to cover this administration.

The sick leave required under the bill could be used when an employee's child's school is closed due to a public health emergency, when the employer closes, or if an individual or family member is quarantined or isolated due to a public health emergency.

Small business (defined as a business with 50 employees or fewer) will be reimbursed for the cost of providing the additional 14 days that must be offered during a public health emergency.

2. **Emergency Leave** - The bill creates a new emergency paid leave benefits program within the Social Security Administration to provide emergency leave days to individuals affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

If a worker is required to take more than 14 days off work due to the COVID-19 virus, he or she is eligible for a monthly benefit payment of two-thirds of his or her average monthly salary (up to \$4,000 per month). Benefits are reduced dollar-for-dollar by the amount of any state or private paid leave benefit the individual may receive. (States that make offset payments will be reimbursed by the federal government if they are due to state-run or state-mandated paid leave programs).

The benefit covers a worker who has contracted the virus, anyone who is quarantined at the instruction of a health care provider, employer or government official, a worker caring for

someone else who has contracted COVID-19, or a worker who is caring for a child or other individual.

These benefits do not count as income or resources for the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program.

- 3. Extended Unemployment Compensation** — For states that experience an increase of 10% percent or more in their unemployment rate over the previous year, the bill provides 100% federal funding for Extended Benefits, which normally require 50% of funding to come from states. Extended Benefits are triggered when unemployment is high in a state and provide up to an additional 26 weeks after regular UI benefits (usually 26 weeks) are exhausted.
- Subsidized UI — Provides states with access to interest-free loans to help pay regular UI benefits through Dec. 31, 2020.
 - Ease Eligibility Requirements — Requires states to take steps to temporarily ease eligibility requirements that might be limiting access to UI during the COVID-19 outbreak, including work search requirements, required waiting periods, and requirements to increase employer UI taxes if they have high layoff rates.
 - Work Sharing — Requires the Department of Labor to provide technical assistance to states that want to set up work-sharing programs in which employers reduce hours instead of laying employees off.