

# U.S. SENATOR BOB CASEY



FIGHTING *for* PENNSYLVANIA FAMILIES

## As Congress Considers Third COVID-19 package, It Should Consider Policies to Protect Kids and Families

While Congress has taken important initial steps to respond to COVID-19, the health, economic, and societal effects are just beginning to be felt and understood. Among other things, more needs to be done to enact policies to protect and support children and families as they seek to respond to and live with COVID-19. Congress has a responsibility to enact into law policies which will provide real relief to children and families and which will strengthen the societal response to COVID-19, especially considering the duration of the likely effect of the pandemic. Congress should take immediate steps to support children and families by:

- ❖ **Providing Public Health Insurance Coverage to Ensure that COVID Does Not Bankrupt Families:** Congress should utilize Medicaid as the social safety net that it is and ensure no one who is suspected to receive a COVID-19 diagnosis or requires treatment for care goes bankrupt due to the cost of treatment. If an individual tests positive for COVID-19, they would be automatically eligible for Medicaid for all COVID-19 related treatment, regardless of income, for the length of their treatment, but for no less than one year. In order to ensure that patients are not turned away for care, providers would be reimbursed at 125% of the Medicare rate for services associated with the treatment. The federal government would cover the costs entirely in order to ensure state budgets are not compromised.
- ❖ **Strengthen the Ability of the Private Health Insurance Market to Respond to Public Health Emergencies:** It is more important than ever that every American be able to get the health care they need and not worry about how they will pay their medical bills. We must lower the barriers to care, particularly in a public health emergency, which means allowing people to enroll into plans that provide comprehensive benefits, regardless of whether they are healthy or, in this case, diagnosed with COVID-19. This can be accomplished by requiring insurers to offer a Special Enrollment Period during a public health emergency, as declared by the Secretary of Health and Human Services; providing benefits for services related to the public health emergency comparable to other benefits; and limiting cost-sharing,

such as by waiving co-payments for vaccines and testing, to encourage people to seek care without fear of financial burden.

- ❖ **Ensure the Availability of Child Care Coverage to COVID-Affected Families, Especially Frontline Providers:** Congress should increase funding for the Child Care and Development Block Grant by \$4 Billion to provide states with resources needed so that child care systems can weather economic disruptions and remain safely operational. Child care providers operate on razor thin margins, and closures or a lack of attendance could cause them to close. Providing states with the resources to provide assistance based on enrollment rather than attendance, and continue providing payments when there are closures or parents are unable to pay, will help to ensure providers remain solvent and can continue to provide care. Similarly, additional funds to pay for needed sanitation supplies and services, as well as substitute educators, will help to ensure providers can remain safely operational. Finally, in order to ensure we do not face staffing shortages at hospitals or in other essential services, additional resources should be set aside to ensure front line workers, such as health care workers, have care available during public health emergencies.
- ❖ **Build the Capacity of the Food Assistance System to Assist Families:** In order to reinforce guidance that Americans, particularly older adults and immunocompromised individuals, stay at home as much as possible, or in some cases comply with 'shelter in place' orders, additional steps must be to ensure that these individuals can use SNAP benefits while remaining at home. This will ensure that individuals can receive necessary groceries at their doorstep. We should also extend certification periods in the Women, Infants, and Children Program so that individuals are not forced to needlessly travel for routine certification appointments. To support families accessing food assistance at food banks, we must streamline paperwork requirements to reduce contact and accelerate the process. Additionally, as the distribution of school meals continues, we should provide needed flexibilities so that existing staff capacity can support this process as needed.

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