

## **Summary of McConnell's COVID-19 Emergency Relief Package Proposal**

On Monday, Senate Republicans announced a \$1 trillion proposal for a 4<sup>th</sup> COVID-19 relief package (CV4) – called the HEALS Act – which provides additional funding for PPP, stimulus checks, and unemployment benefits, as well as expanded liability protections for businesses, schools, non-profits, and healthcare providers. Unfortunately, it does not include many of West Virginia's priorities such as aid for children and youth experiencing homelessness, funding for broadband hotspots, dedicated assistance for rural hospitals, or sufficient relief for local governments on the front lines.

### **No aid for children and youth homelessness.**

- The bill does not include any dedicated funding for children and youth experiencing homelessness, which is on the rise due to COVID-19.
- Right now, there are more than 1.5 million students facing homelessness in this country. On the week ending on July 14<sup>th</sup>, reports indicated that one in five households are behind on rent, meaning that roughly 7 million children are living in a house with overdue rent.
- To address this situation, Senator Manchin introduced the Emergency Family Stabilization Act to establish a \$800 million emergency fund within in the Administration for Children and Families to assist families, children, and youth that are currently or at-risk of experiencing homelessness. Funds can be used for (but not limited to) meeting the health and safety needs, eviction prevention, transportation assistance, emergency child care, education, and employment-related needs.

### **No dedicated assistance for rural hospitals.**

- While the bill includes another \$25 billion for the Provider Relief Fund, to date, less than 10% of the \$113 billion in funding that has been allocated has been targeted directly to rural hospitals. Several hospitals in West Virginia have closed their doors since the pandemic began, and several more may do so before it is over without this assistance. Senator Manchin's Save Our Rural Health Providers Act would guarantee them a fair share of funding. Under Senator Manchin's formula, rural hospitals will receive 20% of the funding, commensurate with the overall U.S. population that lives in rural areas.

### **No funding for broadband hotspots or telehealth.**

- The bill does not include any direct funding for broadband infrastructure, distance learning, or telehealth. This is especially problematic for areas like West Virginia that may not be able to fully reopen schools or businesses but lack the reliable broadband access needed to continue these activities during the pandemic.
- This also creates significant challenges for West Virginians who cannot safely visit their healthcare providers and want to take advantage of telehealth services. Several health providers in West Virginia have yet to receive any funding to help establish their telehealth programs.
- That's why Senator Manchin introduced the HOTSPOTS Act, which would provide \$160 million for rural libraries across the country to lend out hotspots to students, seniors, small business owners, and others that need connectivity at home right now.

### **Insufficient relief for local governments.**

- The bill would allow state and local governments to use existing CARES Act funding for revenue replacement provided that 25% of those funds are given to local governments.
- While that is a step in the right direction, it is well short of the 45% threshold established by President Trump through official Guidance released by the Department of Treasury, which oversees these funds.
- The National League of Cities estimates that just \$13.8 billion of the \$150 billion provided to States in the CARES Act was shared with municipalities, and in West Virginia, the Governor's plan includes just 16% for local governments, split between cities and counties.
- That's why it's critical that the next package include language allowing for greater flexibility for the use of these funds, but also strict requirements on how they are provided to the local governments on the frontlines of the public health crisis that need them the most.