



Supporting Students in Response to Coronavirus Act

Sponsored by Senator Patty Murray (D-WA)

As the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) continues to spread throughout the country, many schools have already closed, and more are likely to follow suit. Likewise, many institutions of higher education have suspended classes, converted to online formats, or closed on-campus food and housing facilities. These changes not only disrupt students' educational pathways, but also their daily lives. School closures can be particularly difficult for students who are food or housing insecure, students who cannot access online learning because they do not have a computer or reliable internet access, families in need of child care, and students with disabilities. School closures also leave many families scrambling for alternative child care options, increasing the demand for child care in communities most impacted by COVID-19. And, students at colleges and universities that close even temporarily can face the potential disruption of their federal financial aid, work, and ability to meet basic needs. Further, the issues related to school closures, social distancing, and quarantine can cause additional traumatic stress in students during this challenging time.

To help early care and education programs, school districts, and institutions of higher education address education-related issues during the COVID-19 outbreak, Senator Murray is proposing the *Supporting Students in Response to Coronavirus Act*. This legislation would provide more than \$3.0 billion through new mandatory grant programs and flexibilities to help keep early care and education programs and schools operational or re-open sooner, provide support services (including technology) to students during school closures, provide emergency financial aid to students in higher education to address basic needs like food and housing, offer students flexibility with their federal financial aid if they are impacted by COVID-19, and provide resources to help educators address traumatic stress in students.

The *Supporting Students in Response to Coronavirus Act* would provide funding for:

- **Education Preparedness and Support Grants.** \$1.2 billion in mandatory funding to provide Education Preparedness and Support Grants to governors to provide funding to school districts, or institutions of higher education impacted by qualifying emergencies such as the COVID-19 outbreak. These grants are intended to provide resources to help schools plan for closures, including how to provide meals to students, support efforts to clean and sanitize educational facilities, provide training to educators and other staff on how to properly ensure their buildings are safe for students return, help coordinate eligible entities' preparedness and response efforts with public health departments and other relevant agencies, develop and implement procedures to improve preparedness response efforts, provide mental health services and supports, and support other activities that are necessary to maintain the operation of child care providers, public schools, or institutions of higher education.
- **Early Care and Education Programs.** \$600 million in mandatory funding to provide grants to early care and education programs to maintain critical program operation, including meeting emergency staffing needs, covering costs to clean and sanitize facilities, and providing training and supports to staff.

- **Emergency Financial Aid for Students.** \$1.2 billion in mandatory funding to provide emergency financial aid to students in higher education to help address basic needs created by unexpected college closures and COVID-19 related disruptions, including food, housing, health care, and child care needs. These grants can help create or expand existing emergency financial aid programs at many institutions of higher education across the country.
- **National Child Traumatic Stress Network.** \$3 million in mandatory funding for grantees in the National Child Traumatic Stress Network to provide resources for families, caregivers, early care and education programs, teachers, principals, administrators, and other school leaders to help address the challenges related to stress associated with COVID-19.

Additionally, the *Supporting Students in Response to Coronavirus Act* would support:

- **Students and Institutions of Higher Education.** New flexibility for students and institutions of higher education to ensure continued access to federal financial aid to help remove the financial stress associated with a temporary leave of absence related to COVID-19. The legislation would exempt students from paying back Pell Grants or repay student loans that were taken out for a disrupted term by providing a temporary waiver of 'Return of Title IV' rules. Additionally, students would see other financial aid rules related to satisfactory academic progress and subsidized loans relaxed to help focus on what is best for themselves, their family, and their community.
- **Foreign Institutions of Higher Education.** New flexibility for foreign institutions of higher education serving American students abroad through distance education to ensure students are not disrupted by outbreaks in other countries.