

# Congress Passes Bill With \$1 Billion For MassHealth

By Matt Murphy

State House News Service

The state's Medicaid program is in line to receive an additional \$1.08 billion under a coronavirus relief package that cleared Congress on Wednesday, which would provide relief to Massachusetts as it braces for a possible surge in the number of people enrolling in MassHealth.

The more than \$1 billion in increased reimbursements would pad a budget of a more than \$16 billion at an agency that provides health coverage to nearly 2 million low-income and disabled residents. The federal share of the MassHealth budget is typically over \$8 billion.

State officials are bracing for revenues to plummet as the economy comes to a standstill due to measures taken by the government to stem the spread of the coronavirus. School, casinos, bars, restaurants, malls and many workplaces have shut down.

U.S. Sens. Elizabeth Warren and Ed Markey released the state's expected share of Medicaid funding under the Families First Coronavirus Response Act after it cleared the Senate Wednesday evening.

"The additional funding for Medicaid will ensure that all those who need assistance receive it," House Ways and Means Committee Chairman Richard Neal, who plans on Thursday to visit a breakfast and lunch distribution site for Springfield students, said in a statement. "Folks that receive Medicaid funding are usually some of the most vulnerable and this action is another step in the right direction to make sure that they are cared for."

The bill had already passed the House earlier in the week, and it's the second COVID-19 response bill to pass Congress with money for Massachusetts.

The state has already received over \$12 million in additional support. The bill now awaits the signature of President Donald Trump.

Congresswoman Ayanna Pressley on Wednesday night circulated an email seeking to build support for community health center funding. Pressley, noting she has 15 centers in her district from Cambridge to Roxbury, said centers are being asked to do more and need resources.

"We must make sure the most vulnerable people in our communities receive the critical care they need," she wrote, asking people to sign her open letter to Vice President Mike Pence, who is leading the White House Coronavirus Task Force.

Gov. Charlie Baker, Lt. Governor Karyn Polito and Health and Human Services Secretary Marylou Sudders plan at 10 a.m. Thursday to visit and tour a Quest Diagnostics lab facility in Marlborough where COVID-19 testing is occurring. The closed press tour will be followed by a media availability.

[Michael P. Norton contributed reporting]