

Bill would pay families of essential workers killed by COVID-19

By [Keith Lewis](#), CQ

House Democrats introduced a proposal that would compensate the families of essential workers who died or were hospitalized by COVID-19, similar to the system that pays families of first responders killed in the line of duty.

The measure would provide about \$370,000 to families of workers who died from COVID-19 or half that amount to those admitted to hospitals with severe cases of the disease. It would also provide a \$1,200 monthly stipend to children of deceased essential workers during their pursuit of post-secondary education.

“There is no question that we have an obligation to the individuals and families who have paid the ultimate price to ensure their fellow Americans survive this deadly pandemic,” said Rep. Jackie Speier, D-Calif., one of the bill’s lead sponsors, in a Feb. 5 statement. “We know that financial compensation cannot bring back lost lives, but it’s the least we can do to honor their courage and service.”

The program would sunset after 2022, except for the scholarship portion, according to a draft of the bill (HR 900). Compensation amounts are tied to the Public Safety Officers’ Benefits Program’s education benefits (PL 94-430), which have long been available to families of first responders.

The Secretary of Health and Human Services would appoint an official to evaluate and administer essential workers’ claims, according to the bill.

Eligible recipients would include all essential critical infrastructure workers as defined in guidance issued by the Department of Homeland Security in April. Under it, workers from industries as diverse as health care, transportation, public infrastructure, financial services, and teachers, among others, would be included.

Payments would be tax free, lawmakers said.

No Republicans have signed onto the bill, and it is unclear whether it could pass both chambers. Neither Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers, R-Wash., ranking member of Energy and Commerce, nor Rep. Kevin Brady, R-Texas, ranking member of Ways and Means — the committees with concurrent jurisdiction to consider the bill — immediately responded to CQ Roll Call’s request for comment.

United Food and Commercial Workers International Union, American Association of Nurse Anesthetists, and American Academy of Physicians Assistants have endorsed the measure.

TAGGED: [Coronavirus](#), [First Responders](#), [Higher Education](#), [Labor Force](#)

keithlewis@cqrollcall.com

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