

Hazard Pay for Health Care Heroes

Senator Edward J. Markey & Representative Summer Lee

This bill would empower the Secretary of HHS to issue grants for hazard pay and safety measures during emergencies and disasters for essential health care workers.

Health care workers are essential workers. Time and time again, health care workers show up during and after disasters to do their essential work—care for people. From Hurricane Sandy¹ to wildfires across the West² to the COVID-19 pandemic³ and much more, these workers continue to show up and provide care through crises. Not only do people require acute medical attention in the aftermath of extreme weather, many people rely on uninterrupted access to care. Pregnant people need access to prenatal care, substance use patients need access to methadone, and kidney patients need access to dialysis. It is health care workers who make that care possible. The *Hazard Pay for Health Care Heroes Act* would provide critical funding for essential health care workers and the essential care that they provide, in a world with increasing extreme weather disasters and emergencies.

The 2016 Climate and Health Assessment by the US Global Change Research Program states that one of the key threats of climate change to health is the disruption of essential infrastructure.⁴ Health care workers are the heart of our medical infrastructure—from physicians to nurses to home health aides and health care service workers. As climate change makes disasters more frequent and more hazardous, it's time to put in place a mechanism to recognize the heroism of their work that makes health care possible. *Hazard Pay for Health Care Heroes* is a matter of health justice and worker justice.

The “**Hazard Pay for Health Care Heroes Act**” would:

- Allow the Secretary of HHS to award grants to employers to pay for safety measures (PPE, alternative transit, etc.) and hazard pay (up to \$13/hour to a max of \$25,000/year) during a declared local, Tribal, territorial, State, or national emergency or disaster
- Hazardous duty compensation is available for workers performing essential health care work that is hazardous or for which the commute to perform the essential health care work is hazardous
- Eligible workers are essential health care workers whose work cannot be conducted remotely
- Essential health workers include health care providers, medical technologists, public health workers, orderlies, environmental services workers, home health aides, and other professional roles that the Secretary determines as essential

¹ Leah Curtin, *The healing didn't stop during Sandy*, American Nurse Journal (Jan. 11, 2013), <https://www.myamericannurse.com/the-healing-didnt-stop-during-sandy/>

² Jessica Kutz, *Climate change is forcing care workers to act as first responders*, The 19th News (May 31, 2022) <https://19thnews.org/2022/05/climate-change-care-workers-first-responders-california/>

³ Molly Kinder, *Essential but undervalued: Millions of health care workers aren't getting the pay or respect they deserve in the COVID-19 pandemic*, Brookings Institute (May 28, 2020) <https://www.brookings.edu/research/essential-but-undervalued-millions-of-health-care-workers-arent-getting-the-pay-or-respect-they-deserve-in-the-covid-19-pandemic/>

⁴ US Global Change Research Program, *The Impacts of Climate Change on Human Health in the United States: A Scientific Assessment* (Apr. 2016) https://health2016.globalchange.gov/high/ClimateHealth2016_FullReport.pdf