
LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

August 3, 2020

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FEDERAL

Congress

Senate Republicans [released a series of bills](#) aimed at addressing the COVID-19 pandemic. The bills represent Senate Republicans' offer on the next COVID-19 relief package. Significant priorities for Children's Hospital & Medical Center (Children's) included in the package:

- An additional \$25 billion for the Provider Relief Fund (nearly \$44 billion remains to be allocated to date).
- Authorizes \$250 million to remain available until Sept. 30, 2022, for supplemental payments to children's hospitals that receive Graduate Medical Education (GME) to prevent, prepare for and respond to COVID-19.
- Telehealth. The bill would ensure the Medicare telehealth flexibilities made available during the public health emergency are maintained through the length of the public health emergency, or Dec. 31, 2021, whichever is later, and allow rural health centers and federally qualified health centers to continue serving as distant sites for the provision of telehealth services for five years beyond the end of the public health emergency. The bill also requires HHS to post data on the use of telehealth throughout the pandemic; study the impact of telehealth and other virtual services furnished during the pandemic on access, outcomes and spending; and provide legislative recommendations to Congress.

STATE

Nebraska Legislature

Monday, Aug. 3 is Day 54 of the 60-day legislative session and senators have successfully concluded all three rounds of debate on the FY 2020-21 budget adjustments, the only priority they must accomplish before adjourning.

Changes to the state's two-year \$4.8 billion budget include:

- \$55 million for flood relief;
- \$8 million for Department of Correctional Services pay increases;
- \$8 million in Medicaid provider rate increases for behavioral health and developmental disability services.

The Governor is expected to sign the budget bills this week.

Now that the budget issues are resolved, all eyes are on the big ticket items this session—the enactment of a new business incentive package (the Nebraska Advantage Act sunsets this year), property tax relief and funding for the UNMC project.

The Nebraska Economic Forecasting Advisory Board met Thursday morning for nearly two hours to provide a revised revenue forecast that would address how the pandemic has impacted revenues statewide. Using financials from both the Department of Revenue and the Legislative Fiscal Office, the board voted to decrease revenue projections for this current fiscal year by \$50 million. Senators now have \$90 million to be spent on new legislation, increasing the stakes in what bills remain on the floor.

With a lack of time, money and patience, all other priority bills will not be a sure thing. Children's [bill watch priority list](#) highlights which bills have advanced and which require more debate.

Douglas County Health Department

Last week, Douglas County Health Director Dr. Adi Pour proposed a mask mandate for the county, a decision supported by five members of the board. Soon after her announcement, Governor Ricketts and Attorney General Doug Peterson

urged she withdraw the decision, denoting she lacks legal authority to apply the mandate. The Governor recommends masking to prevent the spread of COVID-19, but does not agree with the criminal implication of any mandate.

Nebraska Schools

Monday, Governor Pete Ricketts and Commissioner of Education Matt Blomstedt hosted a *Back-To-School* press conference. The Governor stressed the importance of children in classrooms this fall, citing resources like nutrition, structure for the best learning environment and social well-being as a few of the many reasons children should be present this fall. The Governor often quoted Dr. Redfield from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) about the unintended consequences if children aren't in the classroom, particularly referencing a heightened number of suicides and drug overdoses among teens during the pandemic.

Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS)

Nebraska DHHS will be issuing emergency supplemental allotments to Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) on August 7. SNAP recipients will not have to take any action to receive supplemental support. A family of four typically would receive \$500 in benefits; the new funding is \$646 per month. DHHS filed a request with the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food and Nutritional Service (FNS) to provide emergency allotment funds for Nebraska households that are receiving SNAP benefits.

(Sources: CHA, AHA, DHHS, Nebraska Legislature, Douglas County Health Dept., Peetz & Co.)