Will We See COVID-19 Financial Relief by the End of the Year?

Without COVID-19 relief, many people will face a drop in unemployment assistance the day after Christmas and evictions on January 1.

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House and Senate leadership discussions on the next round of a long overdue COVID-19 relief package seem likely to come through at the last minute — and potentially over the weekend.

This latest version of COVID-19 relief package will likely include $600-700 in stimulus checks as well as $300 in enhanced unemployment for those who qualify. There are also line items that ensure additional funds for food and rental assistance. This bill will also likely include an additional round of Paycheck Protection Program funds. There will also be indirect funding for cities and states as the agreement will have funding for COVID testing and vaccine distribution.

The current federal funding bill is scaled back significantly from the $2.2 trillion COVID relief package put forward by House Democrats in October, but is larger than the $500 billion bill passed by Senate Republicans around the same time. Critically, this COVID relief package does not have controversial items such as additional state and local funding and liability protections for corporations after both parties failed to come to an agreement on these issues. Senate Republicans have been reluctant to provide more funding for cities and states who were heavily impacted by COVID-19 and are feeling further strain from higher rates of unemployment and higher use of their state Medicaid systems.

On this front, Senate Republicans also continue to push liability protections for employers, which would shield businesses from lawsuits seeking to hold companies responsible for the spread of COVID. This is especially concerning for those who are at risk of contracting COVID if basic protection measures to prevent the spread of COVID are not taken, resulting in even more individuals with disabilities forced to choose between their job or their health. This section will be difficult to pass in the coming months, as the incoming Biden administration does not seem to support liability protections.

What is more alarming is that most state and local governments find themselves with nearly empty financial resources as we look toward 2021. Many state budgets were decimated by the pandemic, which has continued to spread across major cities and overwhelm major hospitals with COVID patients. This could have devastating effects, as many states are looking at substantial

deficits in their 2021 budgets, which will likely lead to budget cuts that impact HIV organizations.

Currently, the relief package is attached to a vote that will fund the government through 2021. Without the contents of this package before the current continuing resolution funding the federal government ends Friday evening, we could see a brief government shutdown over some of the weekend. Legislators are eager to put this bill to a vote to ensure action is taken ahead of the upcoming holiday recess.

Without this action, many people will face a drop in unemployment assistance the day after Christmas. It means many will be facing eviction on Jan. 1, when eviction protections run out.

With winter settling in, long lines at food banks and spiking COVID cases, it is past due time for Congress to act.

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