

Covid Relief

The long-awaited fifth COVID-19 package resulted in additional pandemic relief to the country, while also stimulating the economy and addressing the state and local government need for aid. NYS will receive \$12.825 billion in fiscal relief, critically important to help address our projected state budget gaps. An additional \$9.948 billion will go to local governments, helping to offset costs from reduced sales taxes and closed businesses. Federal aid to local governments will reduce the impact of the pandemic economy that would otherwise have meant slashed services or an increase in local property taxpayers. School districts will also receive more funding directly from the federal government.

The \$1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan includes funding for many needed initiatives:

- Pandemic support for vaccine distribution, contact tracing, testing, personal protective equipment (PPE) for frontline health workers, and funding to bolster the public health workforce.
- The new law funds transit systems, rural health care providers, expanded access to mental health and substance abuse services, improves health insurance premium relief and continues to provide unemployment benefits.



- Expands the child tax credit and reduces poverty for households with children. The benefits will lift 242,000 NYS children out of poverty.
- Provides additional relief for low-income households impacted by the pandemic economy, including assistance with rent, funeral costs, and utility bills.
- Expands benefits such as a continuation of a 15% bump in food stamp benefits through September 30th.

The direct stimulus provides a new \$1400 payment to 82% of all adults in NY. Some glitches in previous distribution of stimulus payments have been fixed under the most recent bill, so there is an automatic benefit for those who do not file taxes but collect Social Security, SSI, railroad retirement or veterans benefits. **Also, within the defined household income limits, payments are made for each household member, including children & adult dependents. Stimulus payments will not affect eligibility for federal means-tested programs like Medicaid, SSI, and SNAP.**

These federal stimulus payments should have already appeared in your bank account.

If you did not receive your payment, go to www.irs.gov/coronavirus/get-my-payment to check on the status.

The Plan also invests in aging & disability Services. It increases Medicaid spending on home & community-based services.

Nationwide, it provides \$1.4 billion increased funding for programs under the Older Americans Act, including:

- Supportive services
- COVID-19 vaccine outreach
- Social isolation
- Family caregiver supports
- Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program
- The Elder Justice Act
- Grants to public transit systems to improve access for older adults and people with disabilities

The law creates the National Center for Grandfamilies to provide assistance to programs that serve grandfamilies and kinship families where the primary caregiver is an adult age 55 or older or the child has one or more disabilities.



Other Issues to be Tackled

The American Rescue Plan addressed some insurance concerns regarding unaffordable premiums so that no one will pay more than 8.5% of their income on their premium, increasing subsidies for insurance purchasers on the exchange and covering costs for those under COBRA. There is still much to do to stop provider cuts to Medicare, allow Medicare to negotiate drug costs, control drug prices, and to provide guaranteed health care to everyone as a human right. Rep. Jayapal has just reintroduced her bill, HR 1976, Improved Medicare for All. Voting rights, infrastructure, gun control, immigration and adopting a budget are all major issues ahead.



BILL TRACKER

The 2021 StateWide Bill Tracker (updated on 3/9) will let you review a broad array of New York State bills that may impact older residents.

If you have any questions, email Gail Myers at gail@nysenior.org or call 518-689-1084.