

# Scavello: \$912 Million COVID-19 Relief Package Set for Enactment

By Christine Zubeck

(HARRISBURG) – A comprehensive \$912 million relief package to help restaurants, schools, employers, and tenants impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic received final legislative approval on Friday and was sent to the governor's desk for enactment into law, according to Senator Mario Scavello (R-40), who strongly supported the bill.



Senate Bill 109 amends the state Fiscal Code to allocate \$145 million to support Pennsylvania's struggling hospitality industry as it copes with the devastation created by the COVID-19 pandemic and the Governor's mandated closings and restrictions. It also sets aside \$569.8 million in federal funds for Rental and Utility Assistance, \$197 million for education programs.

"I want to thank leaders in the House and Senate for bringing law-

makers back after the storm this week to move this legislation to the finish line," Scavello said. "We came back and did what needed to be done to help people who have suffered great financial hardship throughout this pandemic."

The bill was amended in the House of Representatives on Thursday to exempt income received from the federal Paycheck Protection Program and stimulus checks from taxation under the state's Personal Income Tax and approved there on Friday. It was then considered and approved by the Senate Rules & Executive Nominations Committee on Friday, immediately prior to the full Senate concurrence vote that sent the measure to the Governor for enactment into law.

A major component in the sweeping relief package would transfer \$145 million from the Workers' Compensation Security Fund to the COVID-19 Response Restricted Account to provide county block grants to assist the hospitality industry, including restaurants, bars and hotels.

Grants would be provided in increments of \$5,000 up to \$50,000. Grants may not be used to pay for the same operating expenses already covered by a federal PPP loan or the state's prior \$225 million Small Business Assistance Program.

"The hospitality industry is a critical part of tourism, which is a major employer in our region," Scavello said. "Between the virus itself and the extended, mandated shutdowns that followed, employers and workers in this field suffered greatly. We need to get this critical assistance to them as quickly as possible."

The \$197 million for education, which is also supported by federal funding, would be used to create a \$150 million competitive grant program under the Department of Education to assist non-public schools that have been impacted by the pandemic and have not received government assistance.

The remaining \$47 million would provide:

\$20 million for Career and Technical Schools.

\$14 million for Community Colleges.

\$8.075 million for Private Residential Rehabilitative Institutions, charter schools for the deaf and blind, and approved private schools.

\$5 million for the State System of Higher Education to support its restructuring initiative.

Finally, federal funding for rental and utility assistance would be proportionally distributed to counties based on their population. The conditions set by Senate Bill 109 will ensure the funding is used prudently and responsibly with the intention of providing a financial safety net for tenants and landlords. Funding for the Rental and Utility Assistance program would be provided by federal Coronavirus stimulus money as part of H.R. 133, Consolidated Appropriations Act 2021.

"This legislation was passed with great bipartisan support and is now on its way to the governor's desk. It is my hope that the Governor acts very swiftly to deliver this much needed funding," Scavello said.



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