



EASTERSEALS WEEKLY WASHINGTON WIRE

Week of February 22, 2021

CURRENT NEWS AND UPDATES

This Week in Washington

On Monday, the House Budget Committee passed a \$1.9 billion COVID-19 relief bill out of committee with a manager's amendment of changes. The package is set to go to the House Rules Committee on Friday morning, and House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer has announced the package would most likely receive a floor vote late Friday. Importantly, the version of the bill posted by the House yesterday evening contains the \$15 minimum wage provisions. Now, Senate Parliamentarian Elizabeth MacDonough must decide if this provision meets the strict Senate Byrd Rule. In addition to this issue, Senators Romney (R-UT) and Cotton (R-AK) have introduced a bill that would gradually raise the federal minimum wage to \$10 per hour by 2025, after which it would adjust with inflation every two years. Their bill also includes a requirement that all employers use E-Verify, which is an electronic system that checks employees' work authorization.

On the issue of minimum wage, Senators Manchin (D-WVA) and Sinema (A-AZ) have come out against raising the minimum wage, so it will be interesting to see where this provision lands (or doesn't) as the relief package discussions continue to ramp up in the Senate. Easterseals National will continue to follow the full COVID-19 relief bill as it works its way from the House to the Senate. The legislation remains on track to pass the Senate by March 14, 2021.

If you have any questions or concerns, please reach out to us – we are here to help!

In addition to work related to COVID-19 relief, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) affirmed this afternoon that the Johnson & Johnson single-dose COVID-19 shot is safe and effective. It is expected that the independent advisory panel of vaccine experts, which meets tomorrow, will authorize the shot for use in the United States.

- [For more information on the Coronavirus, please visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\) website.](#)

House Ways and Means Subcommittee on Health to Hold Hearing on COVID-19 Immunizations

The House Ways and Means Subcommittee on Health has announced it will hold a hearing on Friday, February 26, 2021 at 2pm ET on “The Path Forward on COVID-19 Immunizations.” Six clinicians and physicians from across the field of public health are scheduled to testify.

- [Livestream the hearing on Friday, February 26 at 2:00 pm ET.](#)

Government Accountability Office Releases New Issue Brief, “Medicaid in Times of Crisis”

This week, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) published a new report, “Medicaid in Times of Crisis.” The report focuses on how the federal government and states have used Medicaid in times of crises beginning at the time of Hurricane Katrina to the current COVID-19 Public Health Emergency (PHE).

- [View the report brief from GAO.](#)

Government Accountability Office Releases Podcast on Racial Disparities and Diversity Issues

In celebration of their 100th anniversary, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) is promoting podcasts with officials who deal with a range of topics. Recently, three GAO experts with portfolios of work on racial disparities and diversity issues in health care, the economy, and education were interviewed. These experts include Nikki Clowers, the managing director of the Health Care Team; Daniel Garcia-Diaz, the managing director of the Financial Markets and Community Investment Team; and Jackie Nowicki, a director in the Education, Workforce and Income Security Team.

- [Listen to these directors talk about GAO’s important work on racial disparities and diversity.](#)

U.S. Department of Justice Requests Cancellation of Supreme Court Hearing Related to Medicaid Work Rules

As you know, the U.S. Supreme Court was scheduled to hear oral arguments in the case *Arkansas v. Gresham* on March 29, 2021. However, the Biden Administration Monday asked the Court to cancel oral arguments in appeals that the previous Administration filed to let the states of Arkansas and New Hampshire require that some Medicaid recipients work as a condition of coverage. The Biden Administration has noted its concern around state testing policies that put people at risk of losing health insurance, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic and public health emergency (PHE). We will continue to follow this issue, and will let you know if any when this case will be heard by the Supreme Court.

- [Learn more about *Arkansas v. Gresham* and its implications.](#)

Bipartisan Policy Center Releases New Report on Improving Opportunities for Working People with Disabilities

The Bipartisan Policy Center (BPC) recently released a new report, “Improving Opportunities for Working People with Disabilities.” The report specifically focuses on Medicaid and its relationship to working individuals with disabilities. Of note, over 400,000 individuals with disabilities have been able to work through the purchase of Medicaid Buy-in (MBI). This program allows workers with disabilities to access Medicaid community-based services that may not be available through other insurers. States that implement MBI have shown data that this allows workers with disabilities to increase enrollee income; increase number of hours worked; and get a better opportunity to accrue savings for home purchases, retirement, and other needs.

- [View the BPC’s report on Improving Opportunities for Working People with Disabilities.](#)

Administration for Community Living Releases New COVID-19 Resources for Visitation in Congregate Settings

This week, the Administration for Community Living, in conjunction with U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office for Civil Rights, and the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) released new information related to COVID-19 and visitation in congregate settings. The new guidance on visitation is focused on Intermediate Care Facilities (ICF) for Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities and psychiatric residential treatment facilities. The guidance says facilities should allow visits – with appropriate safety measures – by the following:

- Protection and Advocacy systems
- People who provide in-person supports necessary for equal access to care and communication under disability rights laws
- Long-Term Care Ombudsmen (for ICFs licensed as nursing facilities and certified under section 1919 of the Social Security Act)
- Outside healthcare and service providers, including providers assisting with transition from a facility to the community
- People providing support in a compassionate care situation. The guidance further clarifies that compassionate care situations are not limited to end-of-life.
- The guidance offers several examples in which visitation by family and caregivers could be considered compassionate care and makes clear that the list should not be considered all-inclusive.

[View the new guidance from ACL and CMS.](#)

EASTERSEALS ADVOCACY SUPPORT FOR THIS WEEK

- Easterseals signed on to a CCD letter to Congressional Leadership requesting that home and community based services (HCBS) funding be included in the next COVID-19 relief package.
- Easterseals and six other national organizations sent a letter to Acting HHS Secretary Cochran regarding concerns around guidance and implementation of electronic visit verification (EVV).
- Easterseals signed on to a comment letter to Transportation Secretary Buttigieg. The comments focus on efforts to advance accessible air travel.
- Easterseals signed on to CCD's letter to Congressional leadership urging the inclusion of the HCBS Relief Act of 2021 (S.151/ H.R. 525) language in the next COVID-19 relief package.
- Easterseals signed on to a CCD letter to Representatives Porter, Scott, and Foxx voicing strong support for the Student Mental Health Rights Act.
- Easterseals signed on to a CCD Letter to President Biden thanking him for pledging to put Federal funding for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) on a 10-year glide path to full funding and to offer our support in helping to achieve this goal.
- Easterseals signed on to a joint statement in support of the House plan to protect and strengthen American health coverage.

ON THE HORIZON

U.S. Access Board to Host Public Forum on Autonomous Vehicles

Throughout the months of March and April 2021, the U.S. Access Board, in conjunction with other federal agencies, will host a series of virtual meetings focused on making autonomous vehicles (AVs) accessible to passengers with disabilities. The four-part series will provide an open forum where members of the public and stakeholders can discuss considerations, challenges, and solutions in designing accessible AVs. The schedule for the meetings can be found below:

Inclusive Design of Autonomous Vehicles: A Public Dialogue

1. Accessibility for Passengers with Mobility Disabilities: Part 1

This session will cover methods and technologies for entering and exiting autonomous vehicles.

March 10, 2021, 2:00 – 3:30 (ET)

[Register for the March 10 session](#)

The [ePolicyWorks](#) discussion platform will open February 22.

2. Accessibility for Passengers with Mobility Disabilities: Part 2

This session will address maneuvering and securement in vehicles and continued discussion of entering and exiting autonomous vehicles.

March 24, 2021, 2:00 – 3:30 (ET)

[Register for the March 24 session](#)

3. Accessibility for Passengers with Sensory and Cognitive Disabilities: Part 1

This session will address ride hailing and on-board communication for passengers with hearing, visual, or cognitive disabilities.

April 7, 2021, 2:00 – 3:30 (ET)

[Register for the April 7 session](#)

4. Accessibility for Passengers with Sensory and Cognitive Disabilities: Part 2

This session will continue discussion of communication accessibility in hailing and interacting with autonomous vehicles for passengers with hearing, visual, or cognitive disabilities.

April 21, 2021, 2:00 – 3:30 (ET)

[Register for the April 21 session](#)

Visit the Board's [website](#) for further details or to register.

Federal Emergency Management Administration and Administration for Community Living to Hold Workshop, “Ready Seniors”

Increasingly, frail older adults with complex health issues live alone in the community, far from their relatives and caregivers. An older adult may depend on community service providers for basic necessities and psychosocial support prior to a disastrous event. However, the need for these critical services increases when services are disrupted or the senior is impacted during a major disaster. The Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA) Region II and the Administration for Community Living (ACL) have partnered to address this disparity through a workshop aimed at preparing area agencies on aging (AAAs) and other organizations that provide critical support services to senior citizens in their communities. The workshop will take place on March 23 and March 24, 2021.

- [View the tentative agenda and register for the workshop.](#)
- Contact Devin Kerins, FEMA Region II Preparedness Division, at devin.kerins@fema.dhs.gov or 202-579-5160 with any questions.