

Overcoming COVID-19 Together: How to Include Immigrant Families in Federal Relief Programs

The COVID-19 crisis has placed unparalleled strains on the country's most vulnerable families. In particular, the pandemic has magnified the threats facing immigrant families and placed immense stress on families who were already negatively impacted by the Trump Administration's harmful policies on immigration, income supports, nutrition, and health care. Compounding the challenges for immigrant families, Congress explicitly excluded some immigrants and their families from getting stimulus payments. **Before Congress recesses, federal policymakers have a critical opportunity to correct this error and help ensure all families survive these difficult times.** Given that one in four U.S. children has at least one foreign-born parent, the harm from this exclusion is far-reaching. Failure to provide health care and economic supports for immigrants and their U.S. citizen family members hurts immigrant families and their neighbors as well as the health and economy of the nation.

Despite immigrants being heavily represented in essential jobs with a high risk of exposure to COVID-19, the **Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act excluded millions of immigrants and their U.S. citizen family members** from stimulus payments. Immigrant families hit hardest by the pandemic's economic effects are more likely to live in poverty, and more than a third have minor children. Under the CARES Act, stimulus payments are denied to entire families if the tax filer (or spouse, if filing jointly) uses an Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN).

But, a fix to this problem is possible. Recent federal bills aim to remedy this exclusion.

- The House-passed **Health and Economic Recovery Omnibus Emergency Solutions (Heroes) Act** provides economic relief to children and adults in households that file taxes with an ITIN, if otherwise eligible. The Heroes Act applies as if it is included in the original CARES Act, providing economic relief for the initial payment as well as the proposed second payment under Heroes. Nationwide, the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy estimates that approximately 7.9 million in immigrant families that pay taxes, including 3.5 million children, were excluded from CARES Act and would be eligible for relief under the Heroes Act.¹
- The introduction by Senators Rubio (R-FL) and Tillis (R-NC) and Representative Diaz-Balart (R-FL) of the **American Citizen Coronavirus Relief Act** and **Economic Impact Payment Fairness Act**, respectively, provide economic relief only to households where one of the filing adults has a Social Security number (SSN). Nationwide, the Migration Policy Institute estimates that approximately 3.5 million children and taxpayers would be eligible for economic relief under this proposal.² However, this proposal still leaves out children--the majority of whom are U.S. citizens--in households where no parent files with an SSN. Further, unlike the Heroes Act, these bills would also not provide an additional round of stimulus payments.

¹ Analysis: How the HEROES Act Would Reach ITIN Filers, Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy, May 2020), <https://itep.org/analysis/how-the-heroes-act-would-reach-itin-filers/>.

² Migration Policy Institute "Excluded from the CARES Act Stimulus Payments and Included under Rubio-Diaz Bills: U.S.-Citizen and Legal Permanent Resident (LPR) Family Members" July 2020 <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/datahub/State-LevelData-CARES-Excluded-NewMeasures-FINAL.xlsx>.

**Side-By-Side Stimulus Payment Scenarios:
CARES Act, Heroes Act, and Rubio & Diaz-Balart Bills³**

	CARES Act / Current Law	Heroes Act		Rubio & Diaz-Balart Bills
	1st payment	1st payment	2nd payment	1st payment
Scenario 1: Married couple, two children under 17				
Both parents have SSN	\$3,400	\$3,400	\$4,800	\$3,400
One parent has SSN	\$0*	\$3,400	\$4,800	\$2,200
Neither parent has SSN	\$0	\$3,400	\$4,800	\$0
Scenario 2: Single parent, two children under 17				
Parent has SSN	\$2,200	\$2,200	\$3,600	\$2,200
Parent does not have SSN	\$0	\$2,200	\$3,600	\$0

*Under CARES, if the married couple filed separately, with the SSN holder claiming the child as a dependent, they could get a \$1,700 stimulus payment. However, by filing separately, they would lose eligibility for health insurance subsidies under the Affordable Care Act and possibly other tax benefits.

Effective COVID-19 Relief Depends on the Inclusion of Immigrant Families

During this pandemic, immigrants are caring for us, harvesting our food, delivering our goods, and helping us survive. The CARES Act exclusion undermines the wellbeing of children and the country’s public health and economic recovery. But Congress has the opportunity to do better. By passing legislation that provides much-needed direct economic relief to millions more families, policymakers can use an immigrant-inclusive approach that will make the nation healthier and safer.

³ Across legislation, first payment is \$1,200 per eligible adult, plus \$500 for qualifying children. Under Heroes Act, second payment would be \$1,200 per person, up to \$6,000 per tax household. Table assumes children have SSNs.