

My name is Tate Mullen, and I am the Government Relations Director for the Wyoming Education Association. I am submitting testimony today regarding the potential expansion of Workers' Compensation for education employees across the state utilizing CARES dollars. As schools are beginning to reopen, teachers and all education employees are faced with uncertainty and fear as their classrooms have become testing grounds for the means to safely and effectively hold in-person instruction. The brave educators of our state, who will be going back into their classrooms amid this fear and uncertainty, are, without a doubt, essential workers, and we should work to ensure that their health and safety are protected. While the FFCRA provides an expansion of the FMLA program as well as an extension of sick leave for educators, we must work to provide Workers' Compensation to our educators.

While the expansion of the FMLA and the paid sick leave programs ensure that these educators will not lose pay if they or a family member must quarantine due to suspected COVID infection, these expansions fail to cover the cost of care if an education employee falls ill. The national average cost for hospital care for COVID-19 is between \$34,662 and \$45,683. FAIR Health, an independent nonprofit that collects data for and manages the nation's largest database of privately billed health insurance claims, released cost projections for COVID-19 inpatient stays stating that "charges from someone without insurance or who received out-of-network care was estimated to be over \$73,000." Medical costs of this magnitude can bankrupt families and send them on a downward financial spiral. It is imperative that we not only ensure the physical health and well-being of our education employees but in the circumstance that they fall ill, we need to make sure that their financial well-being is protected as well.

Utilizing CARES dollars to provide Workman's Compensation for educators, even though temporary, will help to achieve these goals at no cost to the state. This will also benefit school districts as well, potentially limiting lawsuits against districts. We value education in the state of Wyoming, and we appreciate the health and well-being of those who so bravely walk back into classrooms across the state to educate the youth of Wyoming. It is our duty to make sure that these individuals are taken care of while they, in turn, care for our children and our future.