Emergency Commission approves COVID-19 funding for hospital staff, businesses, workers

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BISMARCK, N.D. – The North Dakota Emergency Commission today approved the reallocation of approximately $35 million in turned-back federal funding to support the state's COVID-19 response, including $15 million to support medical staffing and nearly $14 million to support economic recovery.

North Dakota received $1.25 billion from the Coronavirus Relief Fund as part of the $2.2 trillion Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act. The roughly $35 million approved today was turned back from previously allocated federal funding, including $30 million turned back from the Bank of North Dakota and $5 million from North Dakota Information Technology.

"As hospitals and businesses continue to face increasing pressure from the COVID-19 pandemic, these dollars are being refocused on areas where they can have the greatest impact to help save lives and livelihoods," Gov. Doug Burgum said.

The funding reallocated by the Emergency Commission today includes:

- $15 million for hospital staffing to address the current shortage of nurses for COVID-19 beds in primary care and certain critical access hospitals. These funds are in addition to the $10 million allocated by the commission in October for hospital COVID-19 staffing support. Funding is based on the percentage of increased COVID-19 beds in each facility.

- $8 million to the Department Commerce for expansion of the Hospitality Economic Resiliency Grant program to include the hotel and motel industry. Hotel and motel operators will be eligible for grants of up to $40,000 per location, with a maximum of $80,000 for applicants with

multiple locations. Applicants must be a North Dakota business and demonstrate negative financial impact from the pandemic.

- $6.1 million to cover payroll costs for Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation correctional officers and medical staff who have been substantially dedicated to COVID-19 response and mitigation.

- $2.65 million to Job Service North Dakota for reimbursable employers. This funding is meant to cover 50 percent of the unemployment insurance benefit costs that have been paid to the employees of reimbursable employers who experienced job loss or periods of layoff due to the pandemic. The federal government is already covering 50 percent of the costs through the CARES Act, and without the $2.65 million in this allocation, reimbursable employers are struggling to cover the remaining costs. Reimbursable employers are entities such as schools, hospitals, long-term care entities, other health care entities, providers of services and care for the disabled/developmental disabilities, nonprofit child care, state and local governments, and other nonprofit entities.

- $2.5 million for a program to provide medical expense assistance for first responders and health care workers who are eligible for expanded worker's compensation benefits under Executive Orders 2020-12 and 2020-12.2. The program applies to first responders and health care workers who tested positive for COVID-19 and required medical treatment but were determined to be ineligible for worker's compensation benefits because the job-related source of their COVID-19 infection could not be pinpointed. The Department of Commerce will review applications and administer the grant program.

- $800,000 in grants for qualifying nonprofit organizations that have been negatively impacted by the pandemic and are at risk of folding due to the inability to generate revenue through performance events and education programs. The North Dakota Council on the Arts expects more than 80 organizations to qualify for the grants to assist with salaries and operating expenses.

The six-member Emergency Commission consists of four legislative leaders – House Majority Leader Chet Pollert of Carrington, Senate Majority Leader Rich Wardner of Dickinson, House Appropriations Chairman Jeff Delzer of Underwood and Senate Appropriations Chairman Ray Holmberg of Grand Forks – along with Secretary of State Al Jaeger and Burgum as chairman.

For more information on North Dakota's COVID-19 response, visit www.health.nd.gov/coronavirus or www.ndresponse.gov.

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