



OPENING STATEMENT

House Committee on Education and Labor

Chairman Robert C. "Bobby" Scott

House Committee on Education and Labor Full Committee Markup

H.R. 6102 – Black Lung Benefits Improvement Act of 2021

H.R. 5129 – Community Services Block Grant Modernization Act of 2021

H.R. 2499 – Federal Firefighters Fairness Act of 2021

H.R. 5428 – School Shooting Safety and Preparedness Act

H.R. 3114 – Longshore and Harbor Workers’ COVID–19 Compensation Act of 2021

H.R. 6087 – Improving Access to Workers’ Compensation for Injured Federal Workers Act

Wednesday, March 16, 2022 | 10:15 a.m.

The U.S. Constitution empowered Congress with providing for the general welfare of the nation in Article 1, Section 8, Clause 1. Our responsibility for the general welfare of the nation is the provision for safe and enriching communities. Regrettably, far too many students, workers, and families do not have access to these protections, support, and benefits they need to stay safe and healthy.

Today, the Committee is marking up six bills to help fulfill our commitment to strengthening the social safety net and building safer communities for all.

The first bill, the *Black Lung Benefits Improvement Act*, helps miners and their survivors access the workers compensation benefits they are entitled to receive.

Decades ago, Congress established the *Black Lung Benefits Act* to provide monthly compensation and medical coverage for coal miners who develop black lung disease and are totally disabled. A GAO report found that miners often lack the necessary medical and legal resources to develop evidence to prove their claims.

The *Black Lung Benefits Improvement Act*, introduced by Congressman Cartwright of Pennsylvania, helps miners and their survivors access legal representation, ensures benefits are not eroded due to inflation, reduces the time for processing claims, and protects taxpayers from taking a hit when a self-insured coal company goes bankrupt and cannot pay black lung claims.

The second bill, the bipartisan *Community Services Block Grant Modernization Act of 2021* reauthorizes and improves the Community Services Block Grant, or C-S-B-G, program to help local organizations reduce poverty across America.

In 1964, Congress first established the Community Action Program, the predecessor of Community Action Agencies, or C-A-As, to support locally driven anti-poverty programs.

Today, C-A-As form a network of more than 1,000 organizations that meet the unique needs of communities and help low-income individuals and families find their way out of poverty. Unfortunately, the CSBG has not been reauthorized since 1998 although funding has continued notwithstanding that it has not been technically authorized.

The *Community Services Block Grant Modernization Act of 2021*, introduced by Representatives Bonamici, Thompson, McCollum, Stefanik, DeSaulnier, and Comer, reauthorizes CSBG for 10 years—the longest period in its history—and make a series of key improvements to help millions of Americans achieve economic stability.

The third bill, the *Federal Firefighters Fairness Act of 2021*, makes it easier for federal fighters to secure workers' compensation benefits under the *Federal Employees Compensation Act*, or FECA, for work-related illnesses.

Because of routine exposure to hazards—such as toxic smoke—, firefighters are at an increased risk of being diagnosed with lung cancer and other diseases. Laws in 48 states provide presumptions to ensure benefits are provided to local and state firefighters for work-related diseases, but when federal firefighters apply for FECA benefits, they are faced with a steep burden of proof.

The bipartisan *Federal Firefighters Fairness Act of 2021*, introduced by Representatives Carbajal and Bacon, provides a presumption—based on scientific evidence—that certain illnesses should be deemed work-related and ensures that these heroic public servants receive the benefits they deserve.

The fourth bill, the *School Shooting Safety and Preparedness Act*, improves school safety by providing uniform data to policy makers and the public on gun violence in schools.

Between August 1st and December 31st of 2021, there were at least 123 instances of gun violence on school grounds – nearly four times the previous average for that time period.

The first step toward stopping school shootings is understanding how they happen. Critically, this law would create a definition for 'school shooting,' which does not now exist in federal law.

The *School Shooting Safety and Preparedness Act*, introduced by Representatives Wasserman Schultz, McBath, and Hayes, ensures school gun violence is tracked and better understood.

The fifth bill, the *Longshore and Harbor Workers' COVID-19 Compensation Act of 2021*, boosts protections for maritime workers who were diagnosed with COVID-19.

Maritime and longshore workers continued to perform work that is essential to our trade and national defense during the pandemic. Unfortunately, unlike many other essential workers, maritime workers face a nearly insurmountable burden of proof to establish that their COVID-19 diagnosis was related to their work.

The *Longshore and Harbor Workers' COVID-19 Compensation Act of 2021*, introduced by Representative Mrvan, provides maritime workers with the presumption that their COVID-19 diagnosis was work related if they were engaged in work activities with coworkers or the public where there was a risk of exposure. This bill reimburses employers or their insurers for the cost of disability compensation and medical benefits. This bill has passed the House three times in the past two years, but it has died in the Senate each time.

The final bill, *Improving Access to Workers' Compensation for Injured Federal Workers Act*, expands access to medical care for injured workers.

Currently, FECA only authorizes physicians to diagnose, prescribe, and provide treatments for work-related injuries.

The bipartisan *Improving Access to Workers' Compensation for Injured Federal Workers Act*, introduced by Representatives Courtney and Walberg, expands eligible providers to include physician's assistants and nurse practitioners within their scope of state licensure for purposes of diagnosis, prescription and treatment for work-related injuries and illnesses.

Taken together, these proposals are essential to improving the lives and livelihoods of people across the country. I urge all the Members of the Committee to support these bills and help build safer workplaces, safer schools, and stronger communities.

I now am pleased to yield to the distinguished Ranking Member, the gentlewoman from North Carolina, Dr. Foxx for her opening statement.