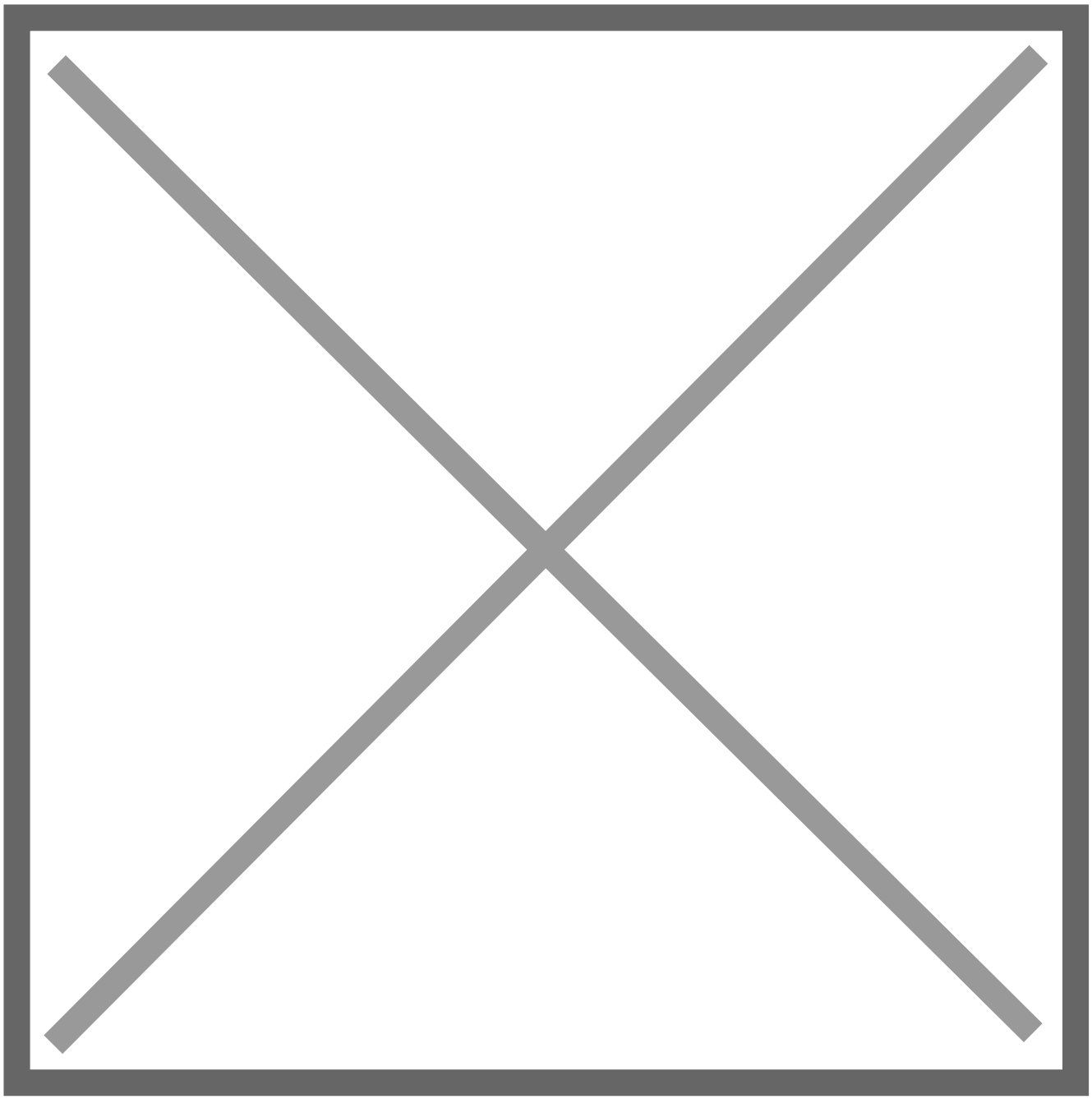
News



Pictures of Detroit residents who died from the coronavirus disease are seen during a drive through memorial in the Belle Isle neighborhood of Detroit, Sept. 1, 2020. Archbishop Paul S. Coakley of Oklahoma City, Okla., chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development, issued a statement Sept. 8 calling on lawmakers in Congress and the White House to reach a deal on the next COVID relief package that meets the urgent needs of the nation. (CNS/Reuters/Rebecca Cook)



by Catholic News Service

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Washington — September 9, 2020
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A leader with the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops has urged Congress and the White House Sept. 8 to reach a deal on the next COVID-19 relief package that meets the urgent needs of the nation.

"Earlier this year, the leaders of our government reached a bipartisan deal that provided significant relief to those suffering from the health and economic crises that we continue to experience. Many of the good relief measures in that previous package are running out," said Archbishop Paul S. Coakley of Oklahoma City, chairman of the USCCB's Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development.

In a statement, the archbishop stressed that "families and individuals are having trouble affording food, housing and health care, and hunger-related crises grow internationally."

He also pointed out that many private schools must choose between reopening and permanent closure and require additional assistance to safely reopen.

"Hospitals are bracing for a spike of cases in the fall and continue to experience fewer preventative and elective health visits," he said, while coronavirus cases are "spiking in detention centers, prisons and jails."

He noted that many businesses and charities "are suffering dire hardship again" and that states, cities and towns "face shortfalls providing essential services."

"Today, I ask our leaders in Washington to once again set aside their differences in order to reach an agreement that prioritizes the poor and vulnerable," he stressed, adding that he and other Catholic bishops have written to congressional leaders multiple times with "specific recommendations on how to meet the needs of this moment."

"It is imperative to act soon. May God grant all those participating in negotiations a heart that eagerly responds to the cry of the poor," he said.

On Sept. 8, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Kentucky, said the Senate would vote on a scaled-back Republican coronavirus relief package within days, but he said it was not likely to pass while the Democrats are seeking more aid.

The Associated Press reported that McConnell described the relief package as not containing "every idea our party likes" and also being far less than what Democrats are seeking.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-California, and Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-New York, said the bill "doesn't come close to addressing the problems and is headed nowhere."

As it stands now, McConnell's bill would provide $105 billion to help schools reopen, provide a shield against lawsuits for businesses and others that are trying to reopen, create a scaled-back $300-per-week supplemental jobless benefit and write off $10 billion in previous debt from the U.S. Postal Service.

The bill also includes $31 billion for a coronavirus vaccine, $16 billion for virus testing, $15 billion to help child care providers reopen and an additional $20 billion for farmers. It also includes a school choice initiative that would provide a tax break for those who donate to nonprofit organizations offering private school scholarships.

The Republican aid package would also provide $258 billion for a second round of "paycheck protection" subsidies for businesses that have been especially hard-hit by the pandemic.

Democrats are seeking a relief package of more than $2.2 trillion and AP has reported that although President Donald Trump's negotiators have shown the possibility of giving more aid, a significant gap remains between what the Democrats want and how much the administration is willing to give.