

Congress: Legislation Needed To Expedite Critical Medical Supplies During A Crisis

Background:

Throughout the pandemic, unprecedented transportation delays severely limited reliable and timely movement of medical products, restricting the supply chain's ability to support healthcare providers responding to patients with COVID-19. The medical products supply chain relies on predictable transport to communicate product availability to providers, allowing them to deliver appropriate clinical patient care. Delays have negative consequences for patients and public health.

In 2021 and 2022, transportation delays became a healthcare issue. HIDA research estimates that approximately 31,000-46,000 containers of critical medical supplies were delayed an average of 29 days throughout the transportation system. A single shipping container can hold up to 3.5 million pairs of exam gloves, 187,000 surgical gowns, and 360,000 syringes.

The Department of Transportation in its [Supply Chain Assessment of the Transportation Industrial Base](#) report recognized the need to "Develop a fast pass system to expedite global transportation of essential medical products." A permanent process must be established to ensure any future critical cargo can be expedited at U.S. ports and transportation hubs.

"Fast Pass" Legislation:

HIDA supports legislation that would create a "fast pass" process to expedite medical and other critical supplies throughout the nation's transportation system in emergencies. Legislation must establish a system to identify containers of medical supplies, prioritize those supplies for container access and sea freight space, and use "peel off" capability for priority handling (ports, rail, trucking).

Key provisions of the pilot projects authorized in the bill would:

- Establish a nationwide data portal for use by importers, freight operators, and the government to ensure the correct freight is expedited.
- Lift restrictions on empty returns in order to expedite the flow of containers.
- Ground empty containers to increase the availability of chassis (the steel frame containers sit on for trucks). Too many chassis sit idle and they should be made available to transport containers of supplies.
- Put an end to appointment-based system for picking up containers, which has contributed to terminal congestion. HIDA recommends allowing trucks to pick up medical supply containers at ports without an appointment.
- Create pop-up ports designated for medical supplies, easing supply chain bottlenecks. HIDA recommends designating space at lots outside the ports specifically for medical supply containers for trucks to pick up.

HIDA looks forward to working with Congress to enact a Fast Pass program to expedite the transportation of medical supplies and ensure future delays are mitigated.