

A panel of the Arkansas Legislature has approved the state Health Department's requests for \$23 million dollars in federal funds to go toward improving contact tracing amid the coronavirus pandemic. Members of the Arkansas Legislative Council today (Tues) approved \$16 million dollars to expand the state's overall contact tracing workforce, as well as \$7 million dollars to curb the spread of COVID-19 in the state's Latinx and Marshallese communities. Democratic State Sen. Joyce Elliott of Little Rock responded to some lawmakers' concerns about well-documented mistrust of medical providers among minority populations, and whether that could affect the state's contact tracing efforts.

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"...who need help."

Numerous lawmakers spoke against both requests citing concerns about the Health Department's accountability in spending funds already allocated by the state. The \$7 million dollars approved by lawmakers will go toward funding bilingual contact tracers, case managers and testing staff at UAMS Northwest and other local clinics. The \$16 million dollar funding package will go toward two companies currently under contract with the state, General Dynamics Information Technology and the Arkansas Foundation for Medical Care, to add at least 700 staff completing contact tracing in the state.