



# Labor, Workforce Development, and Housing ARPA Expenditures

THE METROPOLITAN AREA PLANNING COUNCIL

JULY 28, 2021

**The Honorable Aaron Michlewitz**  
House Chair, Joint Committee on  
Ways and Means

*State House, Room 243  
Boston, MA 02133*

**The Honorable Michael J. Rodrigues**  
Senate Chair, Joint Committee on  
Ways and Means

*State House, Room 212  
Boston, MA 02133*

**The Honorable Daniel J. Hunt**  
Chair, House Committee on Federal  
Stimulus and Census Oversight

*State House, Room 166  
Boston, MA 02133*

**The Honorable Jason M. Lewis**  
Assistant Vice Chair,  
Joint Committee on Ways and Means

*State House, Room 511-B  
Boston, MA 02133*

Dear Chairs Rodrigues, Michlewitz, Hunt, and Lewis:

I write today on behalf of the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) regarding the Commonwealth's upcoming investment of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding. MAPC is the regional planning agency for Greater Boston, serving the 3.2 million people who live and work in the 101 cities and towns of the region. For the past 16 months, MAPC has been deeply engaged with our cities and towns' COVID-19 response, from purchasing personal protective equipment and establishing regional vaccination sites to supporting outdoor dining and shared streets options. Our strong partnerships continue today, as we look to advance an equitable and resilient recovery.

## Principles for Equitable Expenditure of ARPA Dollars

MAPC has put forward a series of recovery principles<sup>1</sup> that have informed our larger position on ARPA expenditures, and the foremost of these principles is equity. The burden of COVID-related infections, deaths, and economic dislocation struck most profoundly on those in our state who already have little, and we hope that ARPA funds will be distributed mainly to help them recover and to become more prosperous and healthier than they were prior to the pandemic. Federal Treasury guidance focuses on spending funds in disproportionately impacted communities or communities which have seen an inequity exacerbated by the pandemic. The Commonwealth's spending plan should be wholly in line with this guidance and every spending decision should be viewed through this lens.

This is a transformative amount of money, and we should be thoughtful in its expenditure, but we should also **spend the dollars in a timely fashion** that reflects the urgency of the public health and economic crisis in our midst. Even after funds are appropriated, it typically takes months to years to design programs and projects, to raise private capital, and to implement projects. Appropriations must begin soon, especially in cases where funds can usefully be added to successful state programs that are currently under-funded.

MAPC is working closely with our cities and town as they discern how to spend the portion of ARPA funds directly disbursed to municipalities and counties. We encourage the state to complement the innovative work happening at the local level and to **incentivize opportunities for regional collaboration** through state programs. Just as the pandemic paid no attention to municipal boundaries, this recovery will not happen one municipality at a time; it will happen when communities work together, across municipal lines, to address common problems. Thus, we hope that, whatever programs you choose to fund with ARPA dollars, you will allow for regional applications, and provide incentives for cities and towns to work together, with each other and with the Commonwealth, to make sure these dollars go as far as possible.

There is room to be strategic with the investment of ARPA funds in order to maximize their possible impact. ARPA investments can help us confront the Commonwealth's housing crisis, achieve our greenhouse gas emissions reduction goals, and promote access to opportunity, all while centering the needs of the most impacted communities. We should align all spending decisions with these **housing, climate, and transportation goals**. Affordable housing investments should include assurances we are building to the highest energy efficient standards. A workforce development strategy should include investments in a clean energy and decarbonization workforce to make necessary technological and infrastructure improvements. These kinds of cross-cutting investments are a prime use of ARPA dollars.

If the Legislature chooses to add funds to existing programs, we believe it should be used as an opportunity to review the efficacy of these programs to ensure they **better serve residents who have faced barriers to accruing generational wealth** and accessing economic opportunity. For example, this state's Commonwealth Builder Program deserves additional resources, but we should consider widening its reach beyond Boston and the Gateway Cities, where it is currently targeted, and enabling families – and especially families of color – to buy homes in other higher opportunity communities from which they have been historically excluded.

Finally, we should not lose sight of the opportunity to **pilot new and innovative programs**. While the funds must be obligated by 2024 and spent by 2026, we should consider what new cross-cutting programs we can pilot to maximize the impact of these dollars now and inform potential new long-term investments in the future.

### **Governor Baker's ARPA Spending Proposal**

Governor Baker has already put forward a proposal on how to spend approximately half of the state's allocation of ARPA dollars. We are offering remarks on the housing and workforce portions of the proposal. Broadly, we feel the bill represents a strong, equity-focused in these two topic areas.

**Housing:** MAPC supports the allocation of \$1B to housing. Massachusetts faces a severe lack of affordable housing, and rents and sales prices have already rebounded over the past few months. Even prior to the pandemic, 10% of homeowners and 25% of renter households across the Commonwealth paid over half their income for housing. The Governor's proposal directs significant resources to produce affordable rental housing that is tied to much-needed social and health services. The proposal will also advance homeownership, especially among households of color who have been previously excluded from many of our communities.

We would like to recommend two additional areas of housing investment for the committee's consideration. First, renovating and adding to the supply of Public Housing, which serves some of the Commonwealth's neediest families, elders, and people with disabilities. Second, we also encourage investing in new and existing market-rate and affordable housing with the most up-to-date HVAC and ventilation systems and near enough to transit to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The need for these investments were highlighted by the Next-Generation Climate Roadmap bill passed earlier this year. It is especially challenging to build affordable housing with the best climate profile, so dollars targeted in this direction would have both a climate and a housing impact.

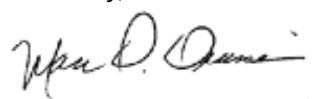
**Workforce development:** ARPA dollars should be focused on better positioning residents who want to be hired into jobs that businesses need filled. The Governor's plan includes \$240M to fund programs to achieve that goal, through investments in workforce credentialing programs, ESOL (English to Speakers of Other Languages) and ABE (Adult Basic Education) programs, and work readiness and essential skills programs.

The Governor's plan also includes \$150M for workforce credential for entry- and mid-level wages. This is an important effort, which we support, but we would recommend prioritizing mid-level wages, in order to address the racial wealth gap. We also recommend prioritizing stipends for individuals while they are in credentialing and community college programs. This would help cover at least some education and living costs, thereby reducing a common barrier to lower-income individuals seeking to participate in such programs. Stipends will incentivize return to the labor force for individuals who have experienced extended unemployment, with priority given to individuals receiving training for priority industries and occupations identified in the Workforce Blueprint Plans that have been established throughout the state. Stipends can be used for time to participate in programs, transportation, or childcare needs.

We would also like to encourage investment in various programs to expand green workforce opportunities. This industry can provide many new, good paying jobs for currently lower-income individuals, and it needs and deserves state support. We also recommend further investment in staff capacity at MassHire Workforce Boards and Career Centers, in order to advance work readiness and skills programming. Finally, the 2019 [Blueprint for Public Health Excellence](#) of the Special Commission on Local and Regional Public Health recommended a set of workforce education and credentialing standards as a first step in ensuring an adequately educated workforce capable of dealing with the 21st-century public health landscape. ARPA funds can and should help us implement that recommendation.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments. MAPC is ready and eager to partner with the Legislature to devise a plan to ensure ARPA funds are spent in a meaningful and timely fashion, in keeping with the broader goals we need to achieve for a more equitable and resilient Commonwealth. As we develop more detailed perspectives with our cities and towns, we will submit additional material over the next several weeks. For more information or if you have any questions, please contact Lizzi Weyant, MAPC's Director of Government Affairs, at [eweyant@mapc.org](mailto:eweyant@mapc.org), or 617-933-0703.

Sincerely,



Marc Draisen  
Executive Director