
Sponsor: Workforce Solutions, Financial Assistance Services and Human Resources

Meeting Date: 12/14/2021

Title: Funding for Workforce Programs Through the American Rescue Plan Act

File Number: 2021-667

Background and Rationale:

The American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) of 2021 was signed into law on March 11, 2021. The relief package provides funding in several areas such as state and local aid, education, rental assistance, transit, stimulus payments for individuals, and other provisions. ARPA also provides \$350 billion in additional funding for state and local governments.

Under ARPA, federal funds are available for spending in multiple categories, including funding necessary to respond to the public health emergency or its negative economic impacts. Further, due to the disproportionate impacts of the pandemic on health and economic outcomes in low-income and racially and ethnically diverse communities, the ARPA Interim Final Rule identified a broader range of services and programs to be responsive to the public health emergency in those communities.

COVID-19 has disproportionately impacted those who are Black, Indigenous or People of Color (BIPOC) as well as those who are younger and less educated.

In order to have the greatest impact, workforce efforts will align with Policy Link's recently published ["10 Priorities for Advancing Racial Equity Through the American Rescue Plan A Guide for City and County Policymakers"](#)

[<https://www.policylink.org/sites/default/files/RecoveryGuide-LJ-2021_050621c.pdf>](https://www.policylink.org/sites/default/files/RecoveryGuide-LJ-2021_050621c.pdf) that stated, *"Every city and county in this country faces the challenge of eliminating racial inequities, and every city and county should use these recovery resources to remove barriers to full participation and proactively advance racial equity and inclusion."* Two priority areas include:

- Connect unemployed and low-wage workers with good jobs
- Invest in frontline, COVID-impacted, and disinvested communities

These proposed Ramsey County investments align with labor market statistics data and the future economic needs of the community and demonstrates an investment in individuals receiving education and other support services as valued assets in supporting the economic prosperity for the community.

Two areas are highlighted below for ARPA funding and align with county identified tiers for investment.

Investment Area #1: Ramsey County Early Childhood Academy (\$750,000)

Ramsey County, like all communities, is currently facing significant shortages in childcare options for families. This is not a new issue, but one that has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

These roles have been essential during the pandemic and will be critical during the post-pandemic recovery. Access to stable childcare is a barrier to returning to work for many Ramsey County residents and workers and is constraining the re-opening of the economy for those that need work

or to engage in reskilling through training or education.

Early Childhood Education and Childcare Services roles have high turnover and require constant cultivation of new talent pipelines and continuous professional development is critical for high quality care. In fact, the immediate need for Early Childhood and Childcare talent is pressing; an estimated 14% of all Childcare Worker talent employed in Ramsey County as of the third quarter of 2020 will need to be replaced due to turnover, retirements, and other job changes or exits, plus an additional 3.5% growth is possible as the region looks toward economic recovery. In addition, early childhood providers require on-going training with new developments in early childhood development particularly in areas of brain development and dealing with topics such as adverse childhood experiences.

In partnership with its community-based partners, Ramsey County will create a new Ramsey County Early Childhood Academy (the "Academy") that will provide credentialed training for residents that include a unique combination of wrap around supports to people looking to get started in the field. This will increase the pool of qualified early childhood educators and increase the number of available childcare slots in Ramsey County. In addition, the Academy will also provide business consultation, technical assistance, and professional development to increase the number of licensed childcare providers in Ramsey County.

The Ramsey County Early Childhood Academy will address the issues facing childcare in the county through:

- Providing scholarships and other supports for COVID-19 impacted residents to receive the nationally recognized Child Development Associate credential issued by the Council for Professional Recognition and offers recognition for valuable knowledge about working with children and helping them reach their full potential. It is often a first step into a career educating young children. The Academy will recruit unemployed, those exiting high school, people in Family, Friend, and Neighbor caregiver groups and more.
- In addition, the Academy will provide support for COVID-19 impacted residents who have interest in establishing new licensed childcare facilities. Participants will have access to needed training and supports, including being matched with Parent-Aware childcare educators. Participants will get applied, practical training on best practices in adult learning in the Relationship Based Professional Development model.
- We anticipate up to 300 residents to participate in the Academy and become qualified early childhood educators. The Academy is anticipated to save 975 childcare slots that would be lost due to people exiting the field. Through this effort, the Academy will also create an additional 430 childcare slots in Ramsey County.

Investment Area #2: Public Health Career Pathway (\$1,100,000)

American Rescue Plan Act funds may be used for public health workforce development to address the projected shortage of public health workers in the areas of nursing and community health. The COVID-19 pandemic has reinforced that public health workers are essential; providing critical services to keep Americans safe and healthy. ARPA funds will allow Ramsey County to expand its public health workforce, to support vaccinations, testing, contact tracing, community outreach and strengthen the county's future public health infrastructure. The funds will also strengthen Public Health's ability to address the growing public health disparities that exist within the county as well as provide an opportunity to professionally develop and maintain current staff.

During the past decade, nationally the public health workforce has shrunk by 56,000 according to a recent report by Trust for America's Health. The American Nurses Association has predicted the

United States will need 1.1 million new registered nurses by 2022 to avoid a nation-wide nursing shortage. According to Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED), registered nursing is the most in demand job in the state. For Ramsey County, a shortage of registered nurses has resulted in using temporary nurses in many spaces including public health nursing within correctional facilities. Using temporary nurses to maintain operations has resulted in higher expenses. A lack of community health workers who identified as and with Black, Brown and Indigenous communities made it more challenging to address vaccine hesitancy and lower vaccination rates. Coupled with pre-morbidity health disparities that existed before COVID-19, challenges meeting the health needs of Black, Brown and Indigenous communities have been exacerbated. It is critical now, more than ever before, to have a strong public health workforce that can address evolving challenges and needs; and build confidence in public health in communities disproportionately disenfranchised and negatively impacted by COVID-19.

Given the magnitude of the COVID-19 pandemic and the impact it has had on racial and ethnic communities and county public health resources, there is a need to recruit and train people, so the county is better equipped and prepared to maintain day to day operations and adequately prepared to handle the next public health emergency. A bold investment in current Ramsey County staff who are in entry level positions so they can professionally develop as community health workers or registered nurses aligns with the countywide goal, "Opportunity: Enhance access to opportunity and mobility for all residents and businesses through connections to education, employment, and economic development throughout our region." An explicit goal of this effort is understanding and developing transformative ways to grow people and keep them. We plan to evaluate, learn from the participants and think about sustainability throughout. Due to the stress and trauma created before and during this pandemic, this request comes at a time where we have great concern about keeping our Public Health workforce. We need to take aggressive steps to retain and recruit, but also to grow talented staff from within the Ramsey County workforce.

Public Health in collaboration with Human Resources, Workforce Solutions and Financial Assistance Services will launch a Public Health Career Pathways program for staff in entry level positions making less than \$21.00 per hour. Two career pathways will be offered: registered nurse and community health worker. The program will focus on serving up to 30 participants with selection priority for those who are single parents, receiving public assistance and/or members of underrepresented group in Public Health workforce. The program will provide: College preparatory coaching and mentoring, tuition reimbursement, technology equipment, book stipend, laboratory fees and incidental expenses for transportation and/or childcare, and other related academic costs, wage supplement to allow participants to enroll in a program full time. A Community Member Governance Committee will also be created to inform and advise on participant selection and program development.

Participants in the registered nurse track will complete an associate degree in nursing. Upon completion of the associate of nursing program, participants can test for their registered nurse licensure and be promoted into a nursing position in Public Health, Social Services, or other areas of the county as positions become available. After completion an associate of nursing degree, a participant's professional trajectory and economic status will significantly improve. Participants in the community health worker program will receive a community health worker certificate from St. Catherine University and will be eligible to become a health education program assistant which after a few years of experience can lead to a Health Educator position.

Recommendation:

The Ramsey County Board of Commissioners resolved to:

1. Allocate \$1,850,000 of the American Rescue Plan Act funds to support the new Ramsey County Early Childhood Academy and Public Health Career Pathways programs, in accordance with federal guidance.
2. Authorize the County Manager to establish grant accounts for the Early Childhood Academy and the Public Health Career Pathways programs and to transfer related expenses and revenue to these accounts.
3. Authorize the County Manager to enter into agreements and contracts and amendments to agreements and contracts in accordance with the county's procurement policies and procedures, provided the amounts are within the limits of the grant funding.

A motion to approve was made by Commissioner Reinhardt, seconded by Commissioner McGuire.
Motion passed.

Aye: - 7: Carter, Frethem, MatasCastillo, McDonough, McGuire, Ortega, and Reinhardt

By: 

Mee Cheng, Chief Clerk - County Board