

Request for Board Action Details

File #: 2021-618

Type: Administrative Item **Status:** Passed

In control: Board of Commissioners

On agenda: 11/16/2021 **Final action:** 11/16/2021

Title: American Rescue Plan Act Funding Request for Tier 1 Priority Administrative Items

Sponsors: Finance

Indexes:

Code sections:

Attachments: 1. Resolution

Date	Ver.	Action By	Action	Result
11/16/2021	1	Board of Commissioners	approved	Pass

Sponsor: Finance

Title
American Rescue Plan Act Funding Request for Tier 1 Priority Administrative Items

Recommendation

1. Allocate up to \$2,000,000 of American Rescue Plan Act funds to the Public Health response including vaccine incentives and other immediate responses, in accordance with federal guidance.
2. Allocate up to \$5,120,000 of American Rescue Plan Act funds to the Homelessness project, in accordance with federal guidance.
3. Allocate up to \$2,000,000 of American Rescue Plan Act funds to support the administration of the funds and related programs including evaluation, support services and audit functions, in accordance with federal guidance.
4. Allocate up to \$1,000,000 of American Rescue Plan Act funds to the Ramsey County Care Center and Lake Owasso Residence for their on-going COVID response, in accordance with federal guidance.
5. Allocate up to \$1,100,000 of American Rescue Plan Act funds to the Ramsey County Attorney's Office to address the backlog of cases, in accordance with federal guidance.
6. Approve an increase in the personnel complement of the County Attorney's Office by 2.0 Full Time Equivalent Assistant County Attorney, 1.0 Full Time Equivalent Paralegal, 1.0 Full Time Equivalent Legal Secretary and 1.2 Full Time Equivalent Victim Witness Advocate.
7. Authorize the County Manager to enter into agreements and execute amendments to agreements in accordance with the county's procurement policies and procedures, provided the amounts are within the limits of the grant funding.

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. In addition, ARPA provides \$350 billion in additional funding for state and local governments. Ramsey County received \$53,446,702 of the total grant amount of \$106,893,403 million from the US Treasury Local Government ARPA funds. The second installment will be sent to the county from the US Treasury in May 2022. The ARPA funding must be obligated by December 31, 2024 and can be

spent through December 31, 2026. This allows time for planning and investment in various tiers from immediate needs through bold investments that impact the systems and residents of Ramsey County.

In April and August 2021, the County Manager presented an overall approach to the ARPA funding for the county. In the diagram below, it shows five tiers ranging from Tier 1 which is focused on immediate needs up through Tier 5, which is longer term, transformational investments. Since the presentations, several proposals have come to the Ramsey County Board for consideration and have been approved. They include Right Track + workforce initiative (\$2.1 million), affordable housing investment (\$20 million) and the Racial Equity and Community Engagement Response Team (RECERT) work (\$2.7 million). This Request for Board Action is seeking authority for several Tier 1 immediate needs for work throughout the county. Below is a list of each area and explanation of the proposed investment.



Saint Paul - Ramsey County Public Health - \$2 million

In March 2020, Coronavirus was declared a public health emergency nationally and locally impacting the residents in Ramsey County. Since that time Saint-Paul Ramsey County Public Health (Public Health) has worked through an incident command structure to respond to the pandemic. Currently Public Health is working to sustain and operationalize its COVID-19 response. At the same time, the department is working towards recovery and building resiliency during this ongoing crisis by restoring and maintaining critical public health programs, services and initiatives that contribute to the overall health and wellness of Ramsey County residents.

Public Health will dedicate \$1 million in ARPA funding to the immediate needs of the department and community by:

- Sustaining staff capacity through limited duration staff in the areas of logistics, vaccine operations, essential services, school health, public information, community engagement, and outreach with a focus on reducing the impact of COVID-19 among school-aged kids and families, young adults, specific neighborhoods in the county with lower vaccine uptake, and its racially and ethnically diverse communities.
- Extending the vaccine incentive program.
- Continuing to leverage partnerships with health care services and Federally Qualified Health Care Clinics to provide mobile testing and other important public health services that aid the county in our ongoing response and recovery efforts.
- Working with community partners and key stakeholders to identify gaps and opportunities in response efforts that may result in engagement and outreach activities that aid the county in reducing the impact of COVID-19.

Public Health will dedicate \$1 million in ARPA funding to the short-term and long-term recovery efforts of the department and in community by: (1) increasing awareness and access to critical public health services and

programs that were impacted by COVID-19; (2) continuing to build capacity to provide health education and resources to community that promote and strengthen engagement as Public Health moves forward to have a positive impact on residents and the environment during its ongoing response and recovery efforts; and (3) working to address emerging public health crises that have been exacerbated due to COVID-19 such as violence prevention, mental health promotion, and reducing the burden and impact of disease among the most vulnerable communities.

Homeless Project (COVID Shelters) - \$5.1 million

In early 2021, the Ramsey County Board established a homelessness project and authorized the transfer of up to \$20 million to help continue the county's COVID related homelessness response through May 2022. At the close out of the CARES grant, about \$17.9 million was transferred to the Homeless Project. Staff is now requesting an additional \$2.1 million in ARPA funds to achieve the \$20 million goal. In addition, based on ongoing needs for homelessness supports and current financial projections, staff is requesting an additional \$3 million in funding to continue shelter support, benefits navigation, and housing search services, and other expenses needed to keep the county operated COVID shelters open through May 2022. Staff will continue to monitor this work, refine financial forecasts and may return to the Ramsey County Board in the future with additional information and potential funding request. The total Homeless Project request included is \$5.1 million.

Administration - \$2 million

Since March 2020, the county has worked to build supports around the COVID related funding including contract monitoring and technical assistance, program evaluation, sub-recipient monitoring and contract services for review and audit of federal funds. Over the past year and a half, the county has learned more about its needs and built teams to help ensure the work is done to meet federal funding requirements and be responsive to community input received, particularly around contracting.

The \$2 million requested will invest in continuing the Operational Support Services work to complete the reporting, contracting, subrecipient monitoring and accounting related to ARPA. This work will continue throughout the life of the grant but will decrease over time. In addition, Ramsey County is working to bring up a program evaluation team, similar to the CARES evaluation team, that will be funded through this allocation. Once the detail of that team is established, the Evaluation team and Finance will return to the board to present the plan in a workshop.

Direct Care - \$1 million

The ongoing pandemic has had a significant impact on direct care facilities including staffing, COVID-19 care, testing requirements, referrals and much more. Lake Owasso Residence (LOR) and the Ramsey County Care Center (RCCC) have both experienced these impacts and are requesting \$1,000,000 to help address the needs within the facilities. At LOR, residents who previously attended day programs were forced to stay home when those programs closed. Even though a few day programs have re-opened, most services are offered on a very part-time schedule requiring LOR to have minimum staff/client ratios maintained per Centers for Medicaid and Medicare Services (CMS) and Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS) regulations. LOR is also obligated to provide on-site services during the day and have struggled, despite multiple rounds of posting and hiring to fill day shifts, ultimately resulting in increased overtime expenses.

At RCCC, additional staff have been needed to satisfy CMS/MDH requirements including COVID screening at the door, scheduling, escorting essential caregivers and visitors, and COVID testing of all staff and residents. RCCC staff administers vaccinations to staff, residents and others as RCCC is a secondary vaccination site. At the same time, RCCC has been unable to hire Registered Nurses in an extremely competitive market, and the shortage of nurses has resulted in referrals being turned away, less clients being admitted to the RCCC, and a subsequent loss in revenue.

County Attorney - \$1.1 million

Because of the multiple court shutdowns caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the inability to conduct in-

person trials for the better part of 19 months, the Ramsey County Attorney’s Office is faced with an unprecedented backlog of felony cases. This has resulted in an increase in the current caseload for adult felony Trials Division prosecutors, exceeding two to three times the average caseload they had prior to the COVID-19 court shutdown. Court administration estimates that it could take as long as five years to reduce this backlog to pre-pandemic levels. This situation is not unique to Ramsey County as many prosecutor offices throughout the nation are facing similar case backlog crises caused by the pandemic, resulting in nationwide staffing increases being necessary in both prosecution and public defenders offices, along with the judicial branch.

Among the steps being taken by the Second Judicial District to address the backlog include the shifting of some judicial resources from non-criminal assignments to adult felony assignments and the use of retired senior judges from outside of the district. Another innovative plan from the courts is the creation of a special property crimes court that would focus on the approximately over 700 property-related crimes that comprise the case backlog. This plan would require at least 2.0 FTE prosecutors and related support staff to be assigned exclusively to this special court. Although backlog-driven staffing increases have occurred in both the Second Judicial District and the Ramsey County Public Defender’s Office, the Ramsey County Attorney’s Office, regrettably is unable to staff that court with its present complement of prosecutors. It is for this reason that like many prosecutor offices across the nation, the Ramsey County Attorney’s Office is requesting an additional \$1.1 million to hire 5.2 FTEs in additional prosecutorial staff to enable the Ramsey County Attorney’s Office in partnership with its Second Judicial District partners to work through the felony case backlog.

County Goals (Check those advanced by Action)

- Well-being Prosperity Opportunity Accountability

Racial Equity Impact

The programs proposed through the COVID-19 related funding seek to specifically address and overcome issues of existing inequality based on race, ethnicity, class and culture in Ramsey County. This need for a racially equitable response is further underscored by the disproportionate impact that COVID-19 has had on African American, American Indian, and other underrepresented racially and ethnically diverse communities of across the United States. Through focused and targeted engagement efforts, trusted messengers, data collection and continued engagement with community members that can guide program alterations in real-time, Ramsey County will ensure that the processes it employs align with the outcomes the community is seeking.

Community Participation Level and Impact

Throughout 2020 and 2021, Ramsey County has conducted community engagement around COVID-19 issues. The Racial and Health Equity Administrators hosted a series of community engagement events specifically around food and basic needs, workforce solutions and RECERT to help inform ARPA funding decisions. This information has informed the Request for Board Actions brought forward for immediate needs items (Tier 1) and will inform future longer term investments.

- Inform Consult Involve Collaborate Empower

Fiscal Impact

The proposals above include a total request of \$11.22 million for spending and obligations through December 31, 2024. If approved, the total ARPA committed funds including workforce, affordable housing and RECERT, is \$36 million out of the \$53.4 million Ramsey County has received. Funding included in the 2022-23 proposed budget will be from the May 2022 ARPA award. All ARPA funding is accounted for in separate projects and Finance will provide regular reports to the Ramsey County Board and public.

County Manager Comments

No additional comments.

Last Previous Action

On August 3, 2021, County Manager presentation to the Ramsey County Board- Update on American Rescue Plan Act funding.

On June 1, 2021, the Ramsey County Board authorized the County Manager to accept \$53,446,702 from the US Treasury Local Government American Rescue Plan Act funds. (Resolution B2021-121).

Attachments

1. None.