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Initial Round of American Rescue Plan Funding Approved
Investments Will Support Public Safety, Mental Health Crisis Response and More

PITTSBURGH – County Executive Rich Fitzgerald’s spending plan for the initial round of American Rescue Plan (ARP) federal funding was approved earlier this evening. The plan invests $99.75 million into public health and government services, and also commits a portion of funding to offset negative economic impact pursuant to the federal law.

“We’re delighted that the work on these important programs and projects is going to move forward,” said Fitzgerald. “Thank you to the Council Members who voted to get this funding out to assist our first responders, our families with children, and our residents needing mental health services and support. And finally, thank you to President Biden, Senator Casey and Congressmen Doyle and Lamb for their support and assistance as we continue to respond to the worldwide pandemic.”

Key investments include $5 million to volunteer fire companies and emergency medical services, $18.25 million for county-wide radio replacements and public safety radio system upgrades, $10 million to support children initiatives, and $9 million for crisis prevention and response including expansion of mobile teams and peer respite. Overall, the 2021 spending plan calls for $37.75 million to be invested in public health, $15 million to offset negative economic impact, and $47 million in government services.

“Crafting a plan for these funds is an immense responsibility,” said William D. McKain CPA, County Manager. “It has been a delicate balance to ensure that we are being fiscally responsible while also meeting the needs of our community. Thank you to everyone who provided input as we put this plan together. With your help, we were able to craft the best plan possible to meet the priority needs in our county at this time.”

Allegheny County expects to receive approximately $380 million directly from the U.S. Treasury. To date, $190 million has been distributed to the county. Accordingly, the $99.75 million accounts for approximately 50% of the current funding. The authorization being considered by Council covers expenditures for this fiscal year, which ends in December, with subsequent budget blocks being provided to Council for approval moving forward. Pursuant to federal law, all funds must be obligated before December 31, 2024 with all work completed and funding spent by December 31, 2026.

“While the Budget and Finance Department served as the lead on this effort, the work by all of the county departments to identify priorities and provide needed information was absolutely essential to this work,” said Mary Soroka, Director of the Budget and Finance Department. “We look forward to moving this plan forward and ensuring that these funds quickly get to those outlined in this plan.”

A Fiscal Recovery Funds dashboard has been added to the Budget and Finance Department’s website with basic information on the 2021 spending plan, pending Council approval.

Additional information on the priorities set forth for the first segment of funding follow:

Volunteer Fire Companies, Emergency Medical Services
$5 Million
One of the biggest impacts of the pandemic has been the challenge faced by volunteer fire companies and emergency medical services in terms of fundraising and manpower. For years, Pennsylvania has sought to address the growing need to recruit more volunteers to support local fire companies. While numerous studies have been done, most companies still face the task of constant fundraising to support their operations, an effort which was seriously impacted by COVID. In some cases, fundraising may account for nearly 50% of budgets – and the lack of rentals, bingos, fish fries, and other fundraising activities put these organizations in greater peril.

The same is true for emergency medical services which receive funding from calls for emergency and non-emergency transfers. People were not going to the hospital because they were afraid of getting sick, so transfers were minimal which also impacted the budgets of companies already struggling to maintain services. Additionally, volunteers from both fire companies and medical services have decreased as members struggled with their own needs, as well as health and other concerns of the risk for continuing in those roles.

Distribution of funds to the approximately 200 agencies will be made similarly to distribution under the CARES Act. Agencies will each receive $25,000 after they acknowledge how funds must be used and return that acknowledgement to the county.

**Public Safety Countywide Radio Replacements, Upgrades**
$18.25 Million

Emergency services has also seen agencies struggling with old, undependable communications equipment. Dedication of funding will provide each of the over 300 fire, EMS and police departments across the county with several new reliable radios. While not a replacement of all radios, each agency will receive new units to replace their oldest units. The average cost of the radios is $3,000. Agencies will be provided with handheld and/or vehicle mounted units, as needed.

**Children’s Fund, Children Initiatives**
$10 Million

One of the needs in the county that became very evident during the pandemic was the need for more robust, sustainable and reliable childcare. The funding will be used to build capacity of high-quality childcare and support existing programs.

There are existing gaps such as the need for care between infant and toddler, and in before and after school care. Almost half of the funding will be used to support the provider community to support their business needs. This will increase capacity and allow for the continued development of programs to meet community needs.

Another immediate need is for affordable childcare for families who earn more than 200% of the poverty level because existing programs stop at that level when providing financial support. Funding will be used to support existing programs so they can serve more children and youth through an increased number of job-ready staff.

**Mental Health Crisis Prevention and Response**
$9 Million

The pandemic has also caused a significant increase in the need for mental health services due to loss of life, health impacts, financial insecurity including loss of employment, isolation and disruption to daily routine. The commitment of funding to crisis prevention and response would provide more resources for emergencies but will also increase services for respite and diversion care.

The Western Psychiatric Diagnostic Evaluation Center reports that it has seen an increase of 50% in the number of unique consumers seeking help. The resolve mobile teams have also seen an average 17% increase in unique consumers. Based on national surveys showing that 36% of Americans believe that the pandemic is having a serious impact on their mental health, the impact on the county means that over 300,000 residents may be in need of services. While some people are recovering their mental health, others will face new or worsening mental health issues that persist or appear down the road. Allegheny County currently has seven mobile teams with two crisis clinicians each to respond to needs in the community. With this funding, the Department of Human Services will be able to add mobile
teams to focus on municipalities with higher needs. Additionally, there are two walk-in centers for crisis within Allegheny County, with a great need for more short-term beds that can be used for crisis stabilization and jail diversion or reentry. The department would partner to create smaller hubs that include peer respites and will allow for greater intervention with residents in crisis with help provided earlier and in more ways.

About the American Rescue Plan Act/Fiscal Recovery Fund
On March 11, 2021, the American Rescue Plan Act was signed into law by President Biden. The $350 billion Coronavirus State Fiscal Recovery Fund (Fiscal Recovery Fund) is intended to provide support to state, local and tribal governments to respond to the impact of COVID-19. Funding may be used to contain COVID-19 impacts on communities, residents and businesses. Funds may also be used to respond to the public health emergency and negative economic impacts as a result of COVID-19. ARP funds may not be used for any pension funding, or to offset (directly or indirectly) a reduction in net tax revenue.

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