



Dear Commissioner,

Since the onset of COVID-19 in our state, Maine families have faced unprecedented health and economic challenges related to the ongoing pandemic and resulting economic downturn. Even as Mainers are being vaccinated and leaders are looking toward economic recovery, we witness the ongoing need for relief. We appreciate the work of Congress to provide support through the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021. Now leaders in communities across our state have a unique opportunity to utilize these funds to strengthen and stabilize families.

Given the incredible need for these resources, we urge county and municipal leaders to take the following into consideration before making discretionary allocations with these funds:

### **Robust engagement and outreach**

Stakeholders, service providers, and impacted Mainers should have the opportunity to weigh in and their input should be evident in the distribution of funds.

### **Transparency in process**

Discussions and decisions around the allocation of funds should be a public process with a clear timeline. It is essential that the public know how and why decisions are being made and how and when organizations and individuals can apply for specific ARPA funding.

### **Equity in relief**

Given that many immigrant families were excluded from earlier federal relief efforts, extending relief funds to address the need of those families and communities now should be a priority.

In addition to these guiding principles to inform an equitable investment in children and families in our communities, we would also make the following recommendations in terms of this one-time investment in programs and services to support the recovery of Maine families impacted by the pandemic:

Coordinate with and invest in the capacity of already existing programs and services through **community-based organizations**, such as one of the eleven Maine Community Action Programs (CAPS). These entities are uniquely situated to understand the needs of their communities, and to leverage already existing relationships and services to maximize their reach and effectiveness.

Respond to public health needs and economic damage from the pandemic by investing in local **mental and behavioral health and substance use treatment programs**.

Invest in **disproportionately impacted communities**. With greater flexibilities for spending targeted to "other populations, households, or geographic areas disproportionately impacted

by the pandemic,” local governments have an opportunity to respond to these populations with the greatest need.

Initiatives should include affordable housing, lead abatement, addressing disparities in educational resources, promoting healthy childhood environments, expanded home visiting, and services for systems-involved youth and families. More specifically:

- **Early Care and Education**

- [T.E.A.C.H.](#) collaborates with early childhood educators, higher education institutes, child care centers and family child care programs to offer scholarships and supports that improve the knowledge and compensation of early childhood educators. In return young children receive high quality and consistent education from highly qualified educators.
- [The First 4 ME Early Care and Education Program](#) will provide funding to communities to establish comprehensive, high-quality early child care and education, with a holistic, whole family approach that integrates comprehensive resources and services into traditional child care center and family child care settings to improve outcomes for children, families, and providers. [Staff at the Office of Child and Family Services](#) will be working this fall to establish the new program.
- The [Maine Early Childhood Consultation Partnership](#) is an infant and early childhood mental health consultation program that addresses the social-emotional needs of children birth to age eight (0-8) by offering support, education, and consultation to the adults who provide care for them.

- **Home Visiting**

- [Public Health Nursing](#), [Maine Families](#), and [Early Head Start](#) all provide home-based supportive services to expecting and new parents. Specifically, counties could increase access to this important service by increasing the number of public health nurses in their districts.

- **Family Resource Centers**

- [Family Resource Centers](#) (FRCs) are community-based hubs for programs to support and strengthen families. Services typically provided include positive parenting skills, assistance with basic concrete needs, and connection to services like substance use and mental health counseling, child care, and job training. [Healthy Peninsula’s Family Resource Center](#) is a good example of one of these already operating in Maine.

- **Community-based programs for youth involved in juvenile justice system**

- [Credible Messengers](#) collaborate with Juvenile Community Corrections Officers and community providers to support youth who have touched or are at risk of touching the juvenile justice system. They meet with youth to reduce recidivism, strengthen

positive community ties, develop life and prosocial skills, and connect them to services.

- [Regional Care Teams](#) The Department of Corrections (DOC) regional administrators convene meetings of providers and youth and families to support transition-aged, justice involved youth. Teams work to strengthen cross-system involvement to inform and increase supports, resources, and opportunities for youth through a community-based continuum of care to decrease detention.
- Invest in **water and broadband infrastructure**, including lead abatement projects in public and school water supplies and the development of adequate and reliable high-speed internet, with assistance for households through broadband subscriptions and digital literacy.

The significant money coming to Maine counties and municipalities through the American Rescue Plan provides us with a unique opportunity to rebuild our state in the aftermath of this pandemic. It is critical that leaders seek input from those working directly with families, as well as from families directly impacted, to ensure allocations are made appropriately to respond to the need. Working together, we can return not to Maine as it was, but to a Maine that is more equitable, more resilient, and more united in achieving the vision that all Maine children have the opportunity to meet their full potential.

We appreciate your service to your community during this important time of need for Maine children and families. We look forward to the opportunity to discuss these recommendations with you.

Sincerely,

Stephanie Eglinton  
Executive Director  
Maine Children's Alliance