

Federal Advocacy BRIEF

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The American Rescue Plan:

Three Ways Texas Can Use Recovery Funds to Support Victims and Promote Public Safety

The [Alliance for Safety and Justice \(ASJ\)](#) has three recommendations for how Texas's recent collective allocation of \$26 billion in American Recovery Plan's (ARP) State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds can support crime victims and reduce the increase in violent crime associated with the COVID-19 pandemic:

Key recommendations to address the needs of underserved crime victims and reduce violence include:

1. [Establish trauma recovery centers that are widely available in highly victimized and underserved communities and fund community-based victim service providers](#)
2. [Invest in a new mechanism to fund probation and replenish victim compensation and reentry funds](#)
3. [Fund research, evaluation, and infrastructure to support and help sustain ARP Recovery Funds' investments.](#)

These three recommendations represent an unprecedented opportunity for state and local policymakers to use ARP funds to make key investments in public-health programming, address the recent rise in violence, and build the infrastructure needed to promote the safety and well-being of all Texans. To help inform state and local advocacy, this brief's [appendix](#) includes outreach templates to contact state, local, and federal elected officials.

COVID-19 has had a destabilizing impact throughout Texas, but it has been especially devastating for many of the state's rural, low-income, immigrant, Hispanic and Black communities. Lockdowns, job loss, and social disconnection - things many have experienced - have aggravated pre-existing community-level disadvantages. The state has seen significant spikes in certain violent crimes, with particularly sharp increases in homicides in many Texas cities¹. While the precise causes of these spikes in violence are unclear, research has documented a link between public health challenges and safety. Without effective interventions, the public health crisis caused and exacerbated by the pandemic could lock in the increased rates of victimization Texas has experienced over the last year.

From 2019 to 2020, cities across the state experienced dramatic spikes in gun violence and homicides, with some cities reporting increases of 40% or more. According to the National Commission on Covid-19 and Criminal Justice, this increase is a part of a national trend that has “no modern precedent”.

Texas is Committed to Helping Victims in Need

While Texas's Crime Victim Compensation (CVC) program stands out amongst other states in the nation, there are still unmet needs for Texas victims that the state must address. In 2019, Texas reported approving about 16 applications per 100 reported violent crimes, higher than 32 other states. The State's program covers a variety of expenses, and allows victims three years from the crime to file a CVC application. However, Texas still doesn't cover critical immediate needs for victims like relocation for many survivors. Our [Texas Victim survey](#) also reported almost 60% of violent crime victims were unaware that the state even offered victim compensation.


Texas just passed SB 957 that eliminates the requirement to cooperate with law enforcement immediately after a victimization, in order to apply for crime victim compensation. Public safety agencies play an essential role in connecting victims to services, from CVC benefits to emergency housing assistance. The problem is that most violent crime is never reported to law enforcement, especially in highly victimized populations. In 2017, Texas denied 1,700 victims of violent crime compensation because the state found that the victim did not adequately cooperate with law enforcement. This highlights the eligibility restrictions present in the CVC application process, that effectively excludes victims from receiving the help they need. These policies show

Victory for crime victims
In 2021, ASJ helped make critical changes to Texas' Crime Victim Compensation program through the passage of SB 957. SB 957 was supported by 6,300 crime survivors in Texas, who are a part of Crime Survivors for Safety and Justice (CSSJ). CSSJ is a national network of crime survivors whose mission is to create healing and shape public safety policy for those most harmed by crime and violence. The organization is a flagship project of ASJ with 46,000 members across the country.




¹ Harkrider, I. (2020, August 12). *Four Texas Cities Have Increased Homicide Rates*. Reform Austin. <https://www.reformaustin.org/coronavirus/four-texas-cities-have-increased-homicide-rates/>

that Texas is committed to helping victims, but further strengthening of the compensation program is necessary to keep Texas strong and growing.


HOW DOES CRIME IMPACT TEXAS VICTIMS?




4 IN 10


-  **4 in 10 Texans (41 percent)** have been a victim of a crime in the past ten years.
-  Victims of violent crime are more likely to be **low-income, young, and people of color.**
-  **7 in 10 violent crime victims** have been victims more than once.

Crime is a traumatic experience for most victims.


-  **7 out of 10** victims of crime describe the experience as traumatic, and majorities of victims experienced stress (more than 8 in 10), anxiety (7 in 10), fear (6 in 10), and had trouble sleeping (6 in 10) after the incident.



38% HAD TROUBLE WITH WORK OR SCHOOL


-  **More than a third (36 to 38 percent)** of victims had trouble with school or work or physical and medical issues after the incident.

Victims face challenges accessing compensation.

-  **6 in 10** violent crime victims were unaware that the state of Texas offers victims compensation, and less than **1 out of 10** (9 percent) ever received it.


6 IN 10

UNAWARE



1 IN 10

RECEIVED



[Crime Survivors Speak: Texas Victims' Experiences with Recovery and Views on Criminal Justice \(2019\). The Alliance for Safety and Justice.](#)

Models exist to address trauma—they just need to be scaled up

Trauma Recovery Centers (TRC) can provide critical support to Texas survivors and help meet the gaps that are currently present. The TRC is an [evidence-based program](#) designed to provide wrap-around mental health services and assistance with immediate needs such as food, clothing, and housing to underserved crime victims. Many new TRC are embedded in community-based organizations that have unique competencies in recruiting effective staff who assist diverse communities of crime survivors. These outreach services are designed to meet people where they are and be accessible to get them the help they need. That help can also include direct cash assistance, which is a critical resource for survivors. Advocates at TRCs could also help victims apply for victim compensation and will, if needed, arrange for victims to receive more specialized assistance, such as substance abuse treatment, sexual assault or domestic violence services, legal advocacy, or spiritual guidance. Among the tens of thousands of people who are victims of violent crime in Texas every year, establishing and investing in a Trauma Recovery Center could help hundreds of them annually.

The ARP funds represent an unprecedented federal investment to address violence through a public health response. It is important that funding be directed to interventions that center the needs of crime victims, and will address their trauma and allow them to heal.

Recommendations

These recommendations represent the core statutory purposes of the ARP Recovery Funds to address the pandemic's public health crisis and negative economic impact using guidance from the [U.S. Department of the Treasury's Interim Rule](#).

1. Establish trauma recovery centers that are widely available in highly victimized and underserved communities and fund community-based victim service providers

Invest in trauma recovery programs like the TRCs that provide wraparound case management and mental health support, as well as peer-to-peer support, that can help victims heal and prevent further victimization and violence.

Policymakers should:

- **Establish trauma recovery centers in areas with the highest need** A recent report from the National Alliance for Trauma Recovery Centers² showed that one trauma recovery center served about 600 people in a year. TRCs require a minimum yearly budget of \$1 million to be run properly, proving this is an efficient and cost-effective way to assist victims in accessing supportive services. It is important to include TRCs in communities that need them, as well as training and building capacity for existing community-based organizations to work with victims who may not need TRC's intensive mental health services but would still benefit from trauma-informed programming and assistance.
- **Expand trauma support at schools.** Places that have nearly daily contact with young people, like schools, are an ideal touchpoint for youth traumatized by violence, as well as a means of connecting their families to services. Policymakers should use ARP Recovery Funds to increase support for these kinds of proven, trauma-informed interventions led by school-based mental health clinicians—particularly in schools where a high proportion of students has been exposed to violence.

As the causes of violence are often rooted in concentrated community-level disadvantages, community investment should be seen as an essential part of trauma recovery and violence

² National Alliance of Trauma Recovery Centers (2020, July). *Trauma Recovery Centers: Addressing the Needs of Underserved Crime Survivors in Texas*. Retrieved from: https://allianceforsafetyandjustice.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/TRC.Texas_8.3.2020.pdf The second oldest Trauma Recovery Center in Long Beach, California had 568 admissions in a recent annual report. [Annual Report. Long Beach Trauma Recovery Center 2018 (2019). California State University Long Beach.]

prevention. The federal funds should be focused on the expansion of services in the places most impacted by crime, and should prioritize community-based victim service providers. It should also help support victims facing lack of safe housing and living-wage employment, at both the individual and community level. These resources should be made available wherever victims seek help.

Policymakers should:

- **Fund community based victim service providers in places that experience the most violence.** Research shows that the most chronically underserved victims are young, low income, and from communities of color. The [Interim Rule](#) explains that these dollars can be used to fund comprehensive services for low-income communities that have experienced increases in violence during the pandemic. These presumptively eligible interventions also have the capacity to help victims recover from and help reduce the community violence associated with the pandemic, and can be delivered by community-based victims' service providers who are best equipped to address the needs of underserved victims. The types of community-based victims service interventions that can be funded include:
 - Funding community health workers to help community members access health services and services to address the social determinants of health;
 - Funding public benefits navigators to assist community members with navigating and applying for available Federal, State, and local public benefits or services," such as Crime Victim Compensation;
 - Evidence-based community violence intervention programs to prevent violence and mitigate the increase in violence during the pandemic."

- **Provide victims with the resources they need to fully recover from victimization.** These resources include safe and affordable housing, job training assistance, and flexible and direct cash assistance. In the aftermath of a crime, a victim may need immediate safe housing, and the ability to transition to permanent housing while in recovery. While victimization would not automatically make someone eligible for these funds, research indicates that poverty is strongly associated with higher rates of victimization, and that being a crime victim can deeply impact the ability to attain employment or remain at work. Victims also need up-front support, without having to make the expenditure first, and then seeking reimbursement. Giving community based organizations funds to directly distribute to victims will allow them to meet the immediate needs many victims commonly experience, which can trap them in cycles of violence.

- **Establish a fund to pay re-entry workers and victim service providers premium pay for their work during the pandemic.**

2. Invest in a new mechanism to fund probation and replenish victim compensation and reentry funds

The pandemic has highlighted the fiscal challenge with funding probation through fines and fees, and the ARP funds offer an opportunity to create a funding infrastructure that is more fiscally sound. In 2020 probation departments, both small and large, experienced extreme loss of funding due to the pandemic. From data collected from county probation offices across the state, we saw that medium and large counties were hit hard by the lack of funding. One medium size county saw a \$1.1 million decrease in collection of local fees last year, as well as a decrease in treatment placements. A large county reported a \$2.9 million (22%) decrease in fee revenue loss, which has impacted their ability to fund staff salaries and protect public safety. While small and rural departments have not seen the impact larger countries have, they still have reported extreme staff shortages and a decline in revenue as well. The decrease in revenue, staff, and other vital services will have lasting impacts on probation departments across the state for years to come. As cases continue to rise, the unstable fee revenue system and decrease in formula funding to fill staff positions will jeopardize public safety.

Like probation, the Crime Victim Compensation fund is largely paid for through criminal fees and court costs. Recognizing the financial difficulties created and heightened by the pandemic, many individuals were unable to pay their criminal fees, which is causing a decrease in revenue to the CVC fund. This decrease in revenue will impact victims' ability to access the services they need, and prevent the state from addressing the barriers in the program to meet their unmet needs.

Policymakers should:

- *Establish an ARP fund to replenish the losses to probation and victims compensation to ensure public safety*
- *Establish a task force to develop a more sustainable funding system for probation and victims compensation.*
- *Increase funds to re-entry, substance abuse, and victim's compensation programs to make the system more efficient and effective in providing rehabilitation.*

3. Fund research, evaluation, and infrastructure to support and help sustain ARP Recovery Funds' investments.

While state and local governments have long supported programming to reduce violence and assist victims, they often lack the capacities to use data and research to plan, implement, and evaluate government-funded interventions. As a result, there is very little data available to hold public systems accountable, and plan for more resources to be reallocated to community-based victim service providers that are targeting underserved crime survivors.

Policymakers should:

- *Fund researchers to work with victims, victim service providers, violence intervention organizations, and communities in crisis to identify, implement, and evaluate the assistance they need to heal and recover from the pandemic's public health crisis.*
- *Invest in data collection and infrastructure needed to provide policymakers and communities feedback they need to ensure that interventions are measurably increasing safety and wellbeing.*

Appendix

Language to request state and local fiscal recovery funds from Governor Abbott, mayors, and county board executives

Governor Abbott, Texas mayors, and county board executives will primarily be responsible for overseeing Texas' State and Local ARP Fiscal Recovery Funds. As described above, while there will be significant competition for these resources, the ARP supplies several ways that these elected and government leaders can use these funds to support community-led safety initiatives. The best funding requests will combine what ARP mandates the funds should be used for, an analysis of how the pandemic has negatively impacted the organizations making the request, and an estimate of the funding needed for these organizations to address the specific harms caused by the pandemic. As these funds expire on December 31, 2024, requests could be spread out over the next three years.

To contact Governor Abbott, go to

<https://gov.texas.gov/contact>

Dear [ELECTED OFFICIAL/GOVERNMENT LEADER],

Representing more than [NUMBER OF ORGANIZATIONS AND THE KINDS OF SERVICES THEY PROVIDE] that serve [JURISDICTION'S] communities most impacted by crime, violence, and unaddressed trauma, we believe that immediate, targeted, and additional investments are urgently needed to address the severe increases in homicides and victimization associated with the COVID-19 pandemic.

As [ELECTED OFFICIAL/GOVERNMENT LEADER] determines how it will spend the approximate [TOTAL AMOUNT] of fiscal recovery funds it will receive from the American Rescue Plan (ARP), we ask that you dedicate [REQUESTED AMOUNT] to support [LIST SAFETY PROGRAMMING] through the end of 2024, when the funds expire.

As the ARP makes clear, these funds are dedicated “to respond to the public health emergency with respect to the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19),” which includes “the negative economic impacts” it has had on “nonprofits.” These mandated purposes perfectly align with our requests. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profoundly destabilizing impact on [JURISDICTION], driving severe spikes in violence and crime. [USE STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT DATA AND/OR DATA FROM ORGANIZATIONS THAT PROVIDE SERVICES ON HOW CRIME AND HARMS HAVE INCREASED DURING THE PANDEMIC.]

In normal times, our organizations are on the frontlines of addressing violence. During the pandemic, our organizations have gone above and beyond their normal work to respond to this aspect of the pandemic’s “public health emergency.” Throughout [JURISDICTION], the staff of our organizations have risked their own health and safety to serve as front-line workers, mediating conflicts, preventing violence, and responding to crisis mental health needs during the pandemic, as well as delivering food, PPE, and other essential services to people who lack access to vital resources.

On behalf of [ORGANIZATIONS], we urge you to make these targeted investments with the [JURISDICTION'S] ARP fiscal relief funds in communities that have suffered from increases in homicides associated with the pandemic. By investing in these proven solutions that provide targeted prevention and recovery to communities in crisis, [JURISDICTION] can reduce violence and promote safety and well-being of all its residents.

Sincerely,

Outreach language for Senator Cruz, Senator Cornyn, Representatives, and state and local champions

Members of Congress and state and local elected officials can be vital champions to help access ARP resources. Use the language below to inform them about your work, asking for assistance that they can provide. Your request for assistance will depend on the official you are contacting and the funds

you are seeking, but should include requests like asking for help meeting with state and local executives and support for your request for fiscal relief.

To find your state legislator, go to
<https://wrm.capitol.texas.gov/home>

To find your member of Congress, go to
[https://www.govtrack.us/congress/members/map#address=.](https://www.govtrack.us/congress/members/map#address=)

Dear [ELECTED OFFICIAL],

Representing more than [NUMBER OF ORGANIZATIONS AND THE KINDS OF SERVICES THEY PROVIDE] that serve [JURISDICTION'S] communities most impacted by crime, violence, and unaddressed trauma, we are contacting your office today to inform you about our work to access resources from the American Rescue Plan (ARP) and to ask [BE AS PRECISE AS POSSIBLE IN YOUR REQUEST FOR ASSISTANCE.]

We believe that the ARP presents a significant opportunity to invest in public-health programming and infrastructure that can help our communities recover from the pandemic by investing in the solutions that we need to reduce violence and promote safety.

As you know, the COVID-19 has had a profoundly destabilizing impact on [JURISDICTION], driving severe spikes in violence and crime. [USE STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT DATA AND/OR DATA FROM ORGANIZATIONS THAT PROVIDE SERVICES ON HOW CRIME AND HARMS HAVE INCREASED DURING THE PANDEMIC.] In normal times, our organizations are on the frontlines of addressing violence. During the pandemic, our organizations have gone above and beyond their normal work to respond to this aspect of the pandemic's "public health emergency." Throughout [JURISDICTION], the staff of our organizations have risked their own health and safety to serve as front-line workers, mediating conflicts, preventing violence, and responding to crisis mental health needs during the pandemic, as well as delivering food, PPE, and other essential services to people who lack access to vital resources.

Consistent with the ARP's statutory purposes, we have asked [GOVERNOR/MAYOR/COUNTY EXECUTIVE] for [AMOUNT OF FISCAL RELIEF] to support our organization's work "to respond to the public health emergency with respect to the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)." We are also preparing to apply for funding opportunities, including [LIST RELEVANT FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES].

On behalf of [ORGANIZATIONS], we ask for your support in using APR resources to provide the vital assistance needed by our communities that have suffered from increases in victimization associated with the pandemic. By investing in solutions that provide targeted prevention and recovery to communities in crisis, [JURISDICTION] can reduce violence and promote safety and well-being of all its residents.

Sincerely,

About the series from the Alliance for Safety and Justice.

This is the third report from the innovations division of the Alliance for Safety and Justice that takes a deep dive into the American Rescue plan, and how federal funds can be used to address core safety issues. Other reports in the series include The Promise of the American Rescue Plan Funding Opportunities to Reduce Violence, Meet the Needs of Underserved Communities, and Promote a Vision for Shared Safety (April, 2021), and Seven key takeaways that show how State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds can support innovative safety policies and programs (June 2021).

About the Alliance for Safety and Justice.

The Alliance for Safety and Justice is a national organization that aims to win new safety priorities in states across the country, and brings together diverse crime survivors to advance policies that help communities most harmed by crime and violence.