

Federal Advocacy BRIEF

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The American Rescue Plan:

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

The [Alliance for Safety and Justice \(ASJ\)](#) has three recommendations for how Pennsylvania's recent collective allocation of \$13.4 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 and ensure that community-based violence prevention and victim services are widely available in highly victimized and underserved communities;](#)
2. [Provide victims with help to attain housing, employment, and cash assistance;](#)
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 Pennsylvanians. To help inform state and local advocacy, this brief's [appendix](#) includes outreach templates to contact state, local, and federal elected officials.

When quoting from the U.S. Department of the Treasury's [Interim Rule](#), which is the official guidance on how governments should administer the ARP Recovery funds, this brief will hyperlink to the paragraph/section in which the text appears. Pennsylvania's ARP State and Local Recovery Fund allocations can be found [here](#).

During the pandemic, many of Pennsylvania’s communities have suffered from severe spikes in certain violent crimes, particularly gun-related homicides.

COVID-19 has had a destabilizing impact throughout Pennsylvania, 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 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 Pennsylvania cities. 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 Pennsylvania has experienced over the last year.

Beginning in 2020, cities across Pennsylvania have experienced dramatic spikes in gun violence and homicides, with some cities reporting 40% increases in these crimes compared to 2019. 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”.

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

Trauma Recovery Centers (TRC) can provide critical support to Pennsylvania 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 can 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 can 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 Pennsylvania every year, establishing and investing in a single TRC 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 stem from the foundational statutory purposes of the ARP Recovery Funds, which are designed 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 and ensure that community-based violence prevention and victim services are widely available in highly victimized and underserved communities.

ARP Recovery Funds should support trauma recovery programs like the TRCs that help victims heal and prevent further victimization and violence through wraparound case management, mental health services, and peer-to-peer support. 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 prevention.

Policymakers should:

- **Establish trauma recovery centers in areas with the highest need** A recent report from the National Alliance for Trauma Recovery Centers 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.
 - In a separate ARP [allocation](#) from the U.S. Department of Education, the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) Fund, the Pennsylvania Department of Education and local public-school systems will receive \$5 billion. The U.S. Department of Education has urged recipients to use these funds which can be used, among other things, to support [“strategies to reduce violence and enhance public safety, as described below, to the benefit of their students, families, and communities, as part of their efforts to recover from the pandemic.”](#) Policymakers should ensure that Pennsylvania's ESSER Funds support ARP Recovery Funded programs.

- **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."

2. Provide victims with help to attain housing, jobs, and cash assistance.

The pandemic has exacerbated two factors that increase victims' risk of future victimization: housing instability and a lack of living wage work. The ARP Recovery Funds provide multiple ways to break the cycle of violence that the lack of safe housing and living-wage employment engender, at both the individual and community level. These resources should be made available wherever victims seek help.

Policymakers should:

- **Ensure that victims have safe, affordable, and stable housing.** In the aftermath of a crime, a victim may need immediate safe housing, and the ability to transition to permanent housing while in recovery. The Interim Rule outlines several examples of how policy makers can use ARP Recovery Funds to invest in [supportive housing services](#), [affordable housing development](#), and [housing vouchers](#). These resources should be specifically provided to victims.
- **Provide victims with job training and assistance.** One of the core statutory purposes of the ARP Recovery Funds is to address the pandemic's negative economic impact. The Interim Rule encourages state and local governments to focus employment resources on helping people who struggled to work a job that pays living wage during the pandemic. Like housing assistance, ARP Recovery-funded employment resources should be specifically provided to victims. 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.

- ***Provide flexible and up-front cash assistance.*** Victims need up-front support, without having to make the expenditure first, and then seek reimbursement. Along with housing and employment resources, the Interim Rule outlines a process to provide people in need with cash assistance. This assistance is perfectly suited to meet the immediate needs many victims commonly experience, which can trap them in cycles of violence.

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 Wolf, mayors, and county board executives

Governor Wolf, Pennsylvania mayors, and county board executives will primarily be responsible for overseeing Pennsylvania's State and Local ARP Fiscal Recovery Funds. 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 Wolf go to

<https://www.governor.pa.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 Senator Casey, Senator Toomey 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://www.legis.state.pa.us/cfdocs/legis/home/findyourlegislator/>

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.