

The American Rescue Plan Act

Organized labor's recommendations for spending Rhode Island's allotment of funds

Presented by

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On March 11, 2021, President Joseph Biden signed into law the American Rescue Plan Act as a way for the Federal Government to aid State and Municipal governments coping with the fall-out from the COVID-19 pandemic. Rhode Island’s share of these dollars includes \$1.13 billion for state fiscal relief, \$540 million for local fiscal relief, and \$415 million for relief for k-12 schools.

On August 4, 2021, the Rhode Island AFL-CIO convened a gathering of labor leaders from across the state to discuss how the State of Rhode Island could best deploy these funds to help working class Rhode Islanders.

Based on these discussions, we offer the following 26 recommendations for Rhode Island’s allotment of funds from American Rescue Plan Act.

Reward workers for service during the pandemic

- 1. The State should provide COVID-19 recognition pay for Rhode Island’s essential workers, including grocery store workers, health care workers, transportation workers, state and municipal workers, teachers and education support professionals, workers caring for the developmentally disabled community, and all other working people who labored, and continue to labor, during the pandemic.

Improve Rhode Island’s Public Transportation Infrastructure

- 2. The State should use a portion of the available funding to make the RIPTA service free of charge to all riders.
- 3. The State should build a network of covered port stations for the RIPTA vehicle fleet with roof top solar panels and publicly accessible electric vehicle charging stations.
- 4. The State should build a network of restrooms along RIPTA service routes that are accessible for the RIPTA staff and the riding public.

Support Innovation in Rhode Island Public Education

- 5. The State should provide funding to deploy a Community School Coordinator in each public school in Rhode Island.
- 6. The State should provide funding to expand the existing program incentivizing schools to hire School Resource Officers to also include mental health workers and social workers.
- 7. The State should provide funding to make public school-based pre-k education available for all interested families.
- 8. The State should provide funding to local school departments to make school-based meals, both breakfast and lunch, freely available to all students.
- 9. The State should make a down payment, including placing a significant bond measure before the voters on the 2022 ballot, on building new and retrofitting existing school buildings to make all public schools carbon-free by the year 2030 while utilizing union-labor through project labor agreements, ensuring prevailing wage and apprenticeship utilization standards are met.
- 10. The State should use a portion of the available funding to support the 2021 school bus driver law (H6118A and S635A) immediately guaranteeing drivers 180 paid school days while establishing a Rhode Island prevailing wage for the industry.

Support and Protect Our First Responders

- 11. The State should reimburse municipalities for local funds spent on fire service overtime costs during the pandemic and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) expenses.
- 12. The State should pay for an Ultraviolet (UV) light system for every full-time fire department in the State of Rhode Island while simultaneously building a stockpile of PPE including UV lights and HAZMAT suits accessible to fire fighters and all first responders.
- 13. The State should purchase for each Rhode Island fire fighter a personal respirator with at least two spare air cartridges.
- 14. The State should purchase a new rescue vehicle for each of Rhode Island’s full-time fire departments.
- 15. The State should purchase a new or repurpose an existing facility to serve as a permanent location for a pandemic field hospital that can be permanently ready for COVID-19 surges now and in the future.
- 16. The State should improve all state owned and publicly accessible facilities to account for social distancing requirements between members of the public entering public buildings while reorganizing workspaces to ensure proper social distancing between public service workers.

Build A Stable and Resilient Economic Safety Net

- 17. The State should transfer \$200 million of American Rescue Plan funds to the Rhode Island unemployment insurance trust fund to stabilize rates, ensuring unemployed workers will continue to receive benefits while minimizing future cost increases to employers.
- 18. The State should purchase all assets of the Providence Water Supply Board from the City of Providence and require through legislation the City of Providence to deposit all sale proceeds into the City’s pension system.

- 19. The State should purchase all existing municipal school bond debt, reducing municipality liability and increasing municipal bond capacity, allowing every Rhode Island city and town to borrow more for the construction of new, carbon-free schools using strong labor standards.
- 20. The State should pay to replace every lead pipe in Rhode Island’s water supply system with safer material while securing piping against leaks and water waste.
- 21. The State should create an “Office of Co-Operative Assistance” within the Rhode Island Commerce Department, or other appropriate entity, to help assist Rhode Islanders in creating and maintaining co-operative enterprises.
- 22. The State should deposit a portion of the available funds to establish an account within the Rhode Island Infrastructure Bank, or other appropriate entity, to encourage and facilitate Rhode Island’s private sector health care employers in reducing their reliance on carbon-based energy.
- 23. The State should provide increased funding to the Rhode Island Convention Center Authority to help fund increased operational costs and encourage capital improvements at the Convention Center Complex to ensure continued economic vitality for the State’s tourism industry.
- 24. The State should use a portion of the available funds to support job training programs for the school bus workers. The pandemic has shown how school bus workers are in high demand and short supply and fair treatment of these essential workers should be a priority for Rhode Island.
- 25. The State should use a portion of the available funds to support the infrastructure needs of the Rhode Island film and television industry. In states like Rhode Island that encourage film and television production through tax credits, the industry is booming. Sustaining this industry through state-based infrastructure will continue to bring family-sustaining jobs to Rhode Island.
- 26. The State should require certified payrolls on public works projects be streamlined and reported on-line in order to ensure workers are paid in accordance with the law.

If you have any questions or would like to discuss these recommendations, please contact Patrick Crowley of the Rhode Island AFL-CIO at patrick@riafcio.com or 401.330.6870.

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