

American Rescue Plan Act of 2021

Key Provisions for Fire Protection, Emergency Services Special Districts

On March 10, 2021, Congress approved the final version of the \$1.9 trillion coronavirus relief package, titled the *American Rescue Plan Act of 2021* (P.L. 117-2). The bill was first passed by the House on February 27 and went to the Senate where several amendments were adopted before passing an amended version of the bill on March 6 by a vote of 50-49. The package returned to the House for a final vote on March 10, where it passed by a vote of 220-211, almost entirely along party lines. President Joe Biden signed the legislation into law on March 11.

Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds (Special District Impacts)

The American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 includes \$350 billion in direct financial relief for all state, local, tribal, and territorial governments; extends federal supplemental unemployment benefits; increases funding for the Paycheck Protection Program; provides additional utility assistance; and includes additional funding for COVID-19 testing, vaccination, and treatment, among other provisions that assist many industries, businesses, and individuals.

States, territories, Tribes, counties, metropolitan cities, and non-entitlement units of local governments (incorporated areas with less than 50,000 population) will all receive guaranteed funding. **Special districts did not receive a direct allocation; however, language was included that enabled state and local government recipients of direct assistance to transfer funding to special districts.**

Use of Funds:

- To respond to the public health emergency or its negative economic impacts, including *assistance to households*, small businesses, and nonprofits, or aid to impacted industries such as tourism, travel, and hospitality.
- Providing premium pay to workers performing *essential work* during the COVID-19 public health emergency.
- Revenue losses relative to revenues collected in the most recent full fiscal year prior to the emergency.
- To make “*necessary investments*” in water, sewer, or broadband infrastructure.

Paid Sick Leave Credit

The bill provides an extension and expansion of the paid sick and FMLA leave tax credits created in the Families First Coronavirus Response Act. It provides payroll tax credits for employers who voluntarily provide paid leave through September 30, 2021. It also expands eligibility to include all state and local governments that provide this benefit.

Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)

Disaster Relief fund and Funeral Assistance:

The bill provides \$50 billion for the FEMA Disaster Relief Fund to respond to COVID-19 and other presidentially-declared major disasters and emergencies declared and to reimburse state, local, tribal, and territorial governments. This funding can pay for:

- Personal protective equipment.
- Vaccine distribution.
- Sanitization of schools, public transit, and courthouses.
- Health care overtime costs.
- Other related needs.

Funding remains available through September 30, 2025.

FEMA Grant Programs:

Relevant to special districts, the legislation provides:

- \$100 million for the agency's Emergency Management Performance Grants.
- \$100 million of Assistance to Firefighter Grants
- \$200 million for FEMA's Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) Grants

These resources ensure that these critical frontline organizations to be able to continue to support COVID-19 response locally, provide vital services, deliver humanitarian relief, and maintain capacity to respond to other emergencies in their communities. Funding would remain available through September 30, 2025.

Public Health Relief & Response

Vaccines, Testing, and the Public Health Workforce

The legislation provides \$7.5 billion in CDC funding to support vaccine related activities to prepare, promote, distribute, administer, monitor, and track COVID-19 vaccines. This includes funding for activities related to enhancing, expanding, and improving distribution and administration, including activities related to the distribution of ancillary medical products and supplies related to vaccines.

It further provides technical assistance, guidance, support, and awards to State, local, Tribal, and territorial public health departments for:

- Enhancement of COVID-19 vaccine distribution and administration capabilities, including the distribution and administration of licensed or authorized vaccines and ancillary medical products and supplies.
- The establishment and expansion of community vaccination centers, including in particularly underserved areas.
- The deployment of mobile vaccination units, particularly in underserved areas.
- IT, data, and reporting enhancements.
- Facility enhancements.

- Public communication.

The bill also includes \$48.3 billion in funding to the Secretary of HHS to detect, diagnose, trace, monitor and mitigate COVID-19 infections. Activities relevant to special districts include:

- The operation of community-based testing sites and mobile testing units, particularly in medically underserved areas.
- Awarding grants, cooperative agreements, or contracts with State, local, and territorial public health departments to establish, expand, and sustain a public health workforce.
- Coverage of administrative and program support costs.

The legislation also bolsters the public health workforce by providing \$7.66 billion in funding to the Secretary of HHS to establish, expand, and sustain a public health workforce, including by making awards to State, local, and territorial public health departments. Such funds shall be used for costs, including wages and benefits, related to the recruiting, hiring, and training of individuals to serve as case investigators, contact tracers, social support specialists, community health workers, public health nurses, disease intervention specialists, epidemiologists, program managers, laboratory personnel, informaticians, communication and policy experts, and any other positions as may be required to prevent, prepare for, and respond to COVID-19. Further, such individuals shall be employed by the State, territorial, or local public health department involved or a nonprofit private or public organization with demonstrated expertise in implementing public health programs and established relationships with such public health departments, particularly in medically underserved areas. Such funds shall also be used for PPE, data management and other technology, other supplies, administrative costs, reporting, or subawards.

The bill also provides immediate relief to frontline providers who serve communities of color and underserved populations hardest hit by the pandemic, including \$7.6 billion in funding to the Secretary of HHS to support community health centers. Funds are required to be used to:

- Plan, prepare for, promote, distribute, administer, and track COVID-19 vaccines and related activities
- Detect, diagnose, trace, monitor, and mitigate COVID-19 infections, including equipment or supplies necessary for such activities
- Purchase equipment and supplies to conduct mobile testing or vaccinations for COVID-19, including purchasing and maintaining mobile vehicles and equipment to conduct such testing or vaccinations, and personnel needs, particularly in medically underserved areas
- Establish, expand, and sustain the health care workforce to prevent, prepare, and respond to COVID-19
- Modify, enhance, and expand health care services and infrastructure
- Conduct community outreach and education activities related to COVID-19.

Funding is available to retroactively cover these costs.

Rural Healthcare

Provides \$500 million to for rural healthcare; Increases vaccine distribution capacity, medical supplies and medical surge capacity, and expands telehealth access.