



MARICOPA FAMILY SUPPORT ALLIANCE

How Should Arizona Spend Federal Pandemic Funds? MFSA Listening Session on ARPA Funds Report September 8, 2021 by Zoom | 9:00 a.m. –10:00 a.m.

Most Important Areas to Address Disparities in Health and Well-Being

Affordable housing is a huge need. If people are living on the streets, it is difficult to get them the other services they need. Safe and secure housing is the cornerstone of well-being. The need for affordable housing extends to pets, who often lose their homes when their families do.

With the pandemic there has been a huge disruption in employment markets. We need pathways for people to secure jobs that pay a living wage. Lack of childcare, training, and soft skills are all impediments to gainful employment. But the greatest need is for jobs with a livable wage. As people earn a living wage, they are able to provide for themselves and need less assistance. Job training and certificate programs would help people to secure such jobs. Employers, particularly smaller and nonprofit employers, also need help to find ways to afford to hire employees and pay them a living wage. Many employers have job openings that they are unable to fill at wages that they can afford to pay.

Until we end the pandemic and its threat to our community, we will continue to be stymied in efforts to improve conditions for those most in need. Measures to bring this about should also take priority.

In the far west and southwest Valley, including Gila Bend, Buckeye, and nearby communities, transportation is a critical need. People cannot get to jobs, day care, health care, and other resources. Transportation is challenging in rural areas and many communities on the expanding urban and suburban fringes. Health care is also relatively scarce in these communities. We should find ways to assist these communities to address these needs.

Priorities for Utilizing One-Time Funding

When people are evicted, they will eventually transition to finding new housing and will face a host of problems including the need to board their pets, credit problems, need for deposits, and other barriers. People who have an eviction on their record as well as those who were formerly incarcerated have difficulty finding housing and need assistance finding ways to overcome these obstacles. They often do not have access to legal assistance to help them deal with these challenges. A program to provide eviction prevention or support for people in transition is desperately needed.

In dealing with pandemic relief, we discovered that many computer systems and programs were antiquated and could not handle the loads placed on them. Cities and towns lack the infrastructure they need to get the relief funds to the people who need them. We could use libraries and librarians to assist with some of these problems, but some of the relief funds should be used to update and create capacity in these overburdened systems to better and more timely serve those who need services, and to assist those who need help in accessing those services. A network of community services similar to the CARE portal

network that would allow people in need to access all the resources from any entry portal would be a very useful resource.

The need for mental health services has become apparent during the pandemic, for the helping community as well as those whom they help. Some of the funds should be used to increase the availability of mental health services.

Job training programs are a staple of state and local government services. Existing programs could be expanded and revitalized to address the current needs of employers and employees.

Development of more affordable housing is a priority need. Affordable housing is the cornerstone of supporting families and will help form a foundation from which to address the other issues being discussed. In addition, as more market rate multifamily housing is being developed throughout the metro area, pockets of poverty still persist. Public-private partnerships that would address these pockets of poverty in conjunction with new development would be an economic development benefit for the entire community and make better use of the resources.

When considering these priorities, it is important to be aware of what needs are being funded from what pots of money to make the best use of available funds. If transportation will be funded through one of the infrastructure bills, it would be unwise to spend scarce CARES act funds that can be used for other purposes on transportation.