



# Information Alert

*State-Federal Relations Division*

## **President Signs the American Rescues Plan – Providing Additional COVID Relief** March 15, 2020

On March 11, President Joe Biden signed the [American Rescues Plan](#) into law, which passed [220-211](#) in the House and [50-49](#) in the Senate, providing additional COVID relief to mitigate the effects of the ongoing pandemic. For a detailed summary of key agriculture, energy, environmental and transportation provisions please read below, or contact Kristen Hildreth ([Kristen.hildreth@ncsl.org](mailto:Kristen.hildreth@ncsl.org)) for more information, and if you're interested in a summary of the full package see NCSL's webpage [here](#).

### **Agriculture Provisions**

The bill provides an estimated \$10.4 billion to support the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), outside of nutrition funding. The bill dedicates \$3.6 billion to supporting the food supply chain, including purchasing food and agricultural commodities; making grants and loans for small to mid-size processors; seafood processing facilities; farmers markets, producers and other organizations responding to COVID; providing assistance to maintain and improve food and agricultural supply chain resiliency; and making payments for expenses related to crop losses pursuant to the Wildfire Hurricane Indemnity Program Plus. \$300 million is dedicated to the surveillance and monitoring of animals susceptible to COVID-19 transmission, and \$100 million is dedicated to reducing the amount of overtime meat, poultry, and egg inspection costs at small establishments. Additionally, \$800 million is provided for the [Commodity Credit Corporation](#) to make purchases and distributions under the Food for Peace Program which provides U.S. food-in-kind, local food supplies and food vouchers to other nations.

While not directly appropriated, it is estimated that the bill will also provide roughly \$4 billion for loan modifications, debt relief and payments to farmers and ranchers that have been socially disadvantaged in USDA programs, paying as much as 120% of each such farmer or ranchers debt on loans on it made or guaranteed in order to “address the historical discrimination against socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers.” The bill also dedicates \$1.01 billion in funding to create a racial equity commission and improve land access for socially disadvantaged farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners, in addition to scholarships, outreach, financial training, and other technical assistance.

### **Energy and Environment Provisions**

Overall, the bill provides \$100 million for the Environmental Protection Agency to provide \$50 million in grants to address disproportionate environmental harms to minority and low-income populations, and \$50 million to fund air quality monitoring grants under the Clean Air Act. The Fish and Wildlife Service is provided \$95 million to conduct wildlife inspections, care for captive endangered species, and conduct research related to COVID-19 wildlife disease outbreaks.

As in previous COVID-19 relief packages, the bill provides additional funding for the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) to assist eligible low-income households with heating and cooling energy costs. The LIHEAP program is set to receive an additional \$4.5 billion. Additionally, \$500 million will be directed to the new Low-Income Household Drinking Water and Wastewater Emergency Assistance Program created under the FY 2021 Omnibus to assist with payments for drinking water and wastewater expenses.

### **Transportation Provisions**

The bill provides \$30.5 billion to transit agencies for use for operating expenses, including payroll and personal protective equipment costs – of that amount:

- \$26.1 billion for [Urbanized Area Formula Grants](#) to aid transit service in urbanized areas.
- \$2.21 billion for urban and rural area grantees that require additional assistance due to the pandemic.
- \$1.675 billion for [Capital Investment Grants](#), which includes \$250 million for Small Starts projects, and \$1.43 billion for New Starts and Core Capacity projects.
- \$317.2 million for rural area formula grants – states will receive allocations between 5 and 20% of 2018 rural operating costs based on a sliding scale dependent on prior COVID-19 § 5311 formula grants which are specifically for rural areas with fewer than 50,000 residents.
- \$100 million for intercity bus services to support essential connections in rural areas.

Additionally, the bill includes a substantial amount of funding for the aviation sector – providing a total of \$26 billion for airports, airlines and aviation manufacturers. \$8 billion is provided for airports and airport concessions, with a requirement that those receiving funding must retain a minimum of 90% of personnel employed as of March 27, 2020 thru Sept. 30, 2020.

The Department of Transportation can issue a waiver if the airport is experiencing significant economic hardship, or if the requirement has negative impacts on aviation safety or security. Of that amount:

- \$6.4 billion is distributed for costs related to operations, personnel, and combating the spread of COVID-19 at airport facilities.
- \$800 million for sponsors of primary airports and concession relief.
- \$600 million to ensure all airports receive 100% federal cost share for any airport improvement grant awarded to them in FY 2021.
- \$100 million to non-primary airports to aid in the costs related to the pandemic.

The bill also provides \$18 billion for aviation manufacturers and airlines – with \$14 billion to airlines to extend the payroll support program, \$3 billion for airline manufacturers to create a payroll support program, and \$1 billion for contractors to extend the payment of wages, salaries and benefits.

Like in previous relief bills funding was provided for Amtrak. In particular, \$1.7 billion was provided for Amtrak in FY 2021, with \$970 million to support the Northeast Corridor and \$730 million to support the National Network. The bill sets aside \$175 million to be available to Amtrak in lieu of commuter rail and state-supported route payments, and \$166 million intended to support the restoration of long-distance service and employee recalls.