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) 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.

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 ad 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 trail and state-supported route payments, and $166 million intended to support the restoration of long-distance service and employee recalls.