



A Multi-Billion Dollar Opportunity

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Congress recently passed legislation offering financial assistance to those impacted by COVID-19. As a comprehensive package, the American Rescue Plan Act includes help for people affected by homelessness and people at risk of experiencing homelessness. By explicitly including groups that might have otherwise been marginalized and ignored, the American Rescue Plan Act gives state and local governments a chance to improve the living conditions of their less fortunate citizens.

The American Rescue Plan Act provides an inconceivable amount of money for pandemic relief funds. Student Veterans of America claims that over \$50 billion were allocated for healthcare alone—including communal vaccinations. This focus on the public health is a great opportunity for the United States to bounce back from the pandemic and catch up with other countries in terms of quarantine recovery. Additionally, the National Low Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC) estimated a total of about \$50 billion aimed to assist housing and homelessness issues, including \$5 billion to help people who are currently experiencing homelessness. This funding, too, provides great opportunities for issues tangentially related to the pandemic that we've struggled with since long before the arrival of COVID-19.

Homelessness, though not an issue specific to the pandemic, is an issue that has been exacerbated by the threat of COVID-19. Therefore, the American Rescue Plan Act included various forms of homelessness relief, assistance, and prevention. The NLIHC reported rental assistance funds to provide up to eighteen months of help to those that “demonstrate a risk of experiencing homelessness or housing instability.” This assistance also comes with an explicit limitation to state and city administration costs. For those without any means of income before or during the pandemic, the act allows for \$5 billion in housing vouchers for those at risk of experiencing homelessness, including victims of domestic abuse and other unlivable situations. These targeted funds should help prevent many at-risk citizens from becoming destitute by identifying various causes of homelessness as they are made more problematic by the pandemic. Jennifer Erb-Downward expressed excitement for the \$800 million that would go to identifying and supporting children experiencing homelessness, which was more money than the combined total that Congress allocated over the last ten years. They stated that “this funding provides a real opportunity not only to identify children who are homeless and support them in school but to

connect families with resources that could fundamentally end their homelessness.” That is a promising result for this funding, but she is careful to note that this provides only an “opportunity,” not a guarantee.

It would be convenient to announce the American Rescue Plan Act as a victory, but it is really just a chance, albeit a good chance. Because the execution of these funds will be left up to state and municipal governments, it is up to citizens to watch the next actions of their local governments closely. To ensure the funding is put to good use and to help those impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, people need to make it known that they will not tolerate corruption and poor spending. Review your state’s vaccination plans, track local vaccination efforts, and stay informed on homeless support efforts to ensure your local government does not waste this opportunity.

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