



Equitable Rescue & Recovery: VPLC Budget Priorities for 2021 Special Session

The American Rescue Plan Act has provided essential relief to millions of American workers, many of whom are people of color, immigrants, and low-wage workers. 9.5 million of these workers lost their jobs during the pandemic, with 4 million out of work for six months or longer. \$4.3 billion from the American Rescue Plan Act remains available for state recovery. We recommend the General Assembly use these funds to focus on the below items to ensure equitable recovery for all families in Virginia.

Housing

- \$500 million to create new housing units that are affordable to Virginians with income below 60% of the area median income.
- Requirement that landlords seek rent relief money before evicting tenants.
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Family & Child Welfare

- \$3 million for public awareness about and support for family and domestic violence survivors.
- \$750,000 for outreach and assistance for families to access the Child Tax Credit and Earned Income Tax Credit.
- \$23 million to upgrade Virginia's child welfare information system.
- \$1 million for cross-agency Trauma Informed Care Networks administered through the Family & Children's Trust Fund (FACT).
- \$6.2 million for community-based child abuse prevention.
- \$4 million to modernize the "CommonHelp" tool.
- \$2.5 million for child abuse prevention and intervention.
- \$875,000 to expand home visiting in some localities.
- \$8 million for Kinship Navigators to be housed in FRCs, community action agencies, or other local unaffiliated organizations.
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Food Assistance

- Alternative declaration that extends increased SNAP benefits to low-income families.
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Unemployment

- Payments of \$1,000 per month to all applicants for unemployment for all claims that are not fully processed within 30 days of an application being made, provided the individual is not already receiving benefits.
- Fund additional call center staff and training for new staff.
- One-time investment of \$5 million for a multilingual online application process, multilingual marketing materials, and support of current efforts to increase staffing at call centers. Ongoing funds of at least \$4 million a year to support additional staff to process multilingual applications.
- \$2 million for additional planning related to unemployment insurance modernization, in particular the creation of a Virginia Employment Commission (VEC) digital service.
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Broadband & Utilities

- \$700 million to expand broadband infrastructure, particularly in rural areas lacking effective access to internet.
- \$222 million to address internet affordability for low-income people in highly populated urban areas.
- Continued requirement that utilities allow people to pay overdue bills with up to 24-month payment plans and help people apply, if eligible, for additional LIHEAP and other utility assistance funds.
- \$9.8 million for the Low-Income Household Water Assistance Program (LIHWAP).
- \$90 million for energy assistance for low-income households, including weatherization.
- \$90.5 million to clear utility arrearages for low-income households.
- \$3 million to replace the utility assistance information system.
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Language Access

- \$95,000 to implement and maintain a statewide equitable language access policy throughout each state agency in collaboration with the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.
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