



COVID-19

September 20th, 2022

To: County Judge Hidalgo
Commissioners Ellis, Garcia, Ramsey, and Cagle

From: Leah Barton, Managing Director Strategic Initiatives, Office of County Administration
Romeo Solis, Director, ARPA Program Management Office

Re: American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Monthly Report

Since our last report, Commissioners Court has approved investments totaling \$85 million for programs in the Harris County ARPA portfolio. \$20 million was committed to Justice & Safety, including Court Backlog and the Children's Assessment Center. \$55 million was committed to address the immediate impacts on Homelessness and funding of transformative programs in Food & Nutrition and Behavioral Health. \$10 million was invested in program evaluations, administration resources, and voter education.

As part of a visit from Denver and Aurora, Colorado representatives, Harris County helped host a collaboration with the Coalition for the Homeless to highlight local investments in Homelessness.

GOVERNANCE, COMPLIANCE, AND PLANNING

Supporting the competitive procurement of programs remains a focus for the ARPA Program Management Office. There is currently one RFP open for public solicitations:

- [22/0335 Construction for a HAY Center Foundation for Harris County Precinct 1](#)

This program seeks proposals providing construction planning and design for the HAY Center, including a new service and residential buildings providing housing for youth aging out of foster care.

RFPs currently under review across the Health, Housing, and Jobs & Education portfolios include:

Health

- **Lead Testing & Abatement:** Two HCPH solicitations for contractors to support expanded lead testing and abatement of lead in homes and facilities where children's exposure is likely

Housing

- **Brokerage Services:** Two solicitations for brokerage services to support ARPA Affordable Housing efforts through acquisition and resale of single-family and multi-family units.
- **Housing Stability:** Solicitations for affordable housing advisory services covering program guideline development and single family and multi-family acquisition.

- **Water & Sewer Infrastructure:** Five RFQs for water and sewer feasibility studies are under evaluation with one RFP for program management and design; these initiatives have the goal of increasing access to clean drinking water and functional sewer systems, especially in underserved communities

Jobs & Education

- **Early Childhood Contracted Slots Pilot Program:** This program will serve childcare deserts and focus on children who have the least access to care: infants, toddlers, and 3-year-olds from families with low incomes in high poverty areas. The program will prioritize funding to centers that are rated 4-Stars in Texas Rising Stars

On a monthly basis, the Steering Committee continues to review funding allocations and the overall project pipeline, milestone statuses, key performance indicators, and compliance findings for active projects across our focus areas:

Health	Housing	Jobs & Education	County Operations
Behavioral Health	Affordable Housing	Child Care	Justice: Court Backlog
Coordinated Care	Homelessness	Family Financial Stability	
Crime Prevention through Environmental Design	Re-entry / Re-integration Housing	Small Business Support	
Environmental Health: Lead	Water & Sewer Infrastructure	Workforce Development	
Healthcare Access & Coverage			
Food & Nutrition			
Violence Prevention			

NEW INVESTMENTS

Children's Assessment Center:

Funding of \$1.5 million was approved for child abuse prevention, evidence preservation, and treatment efforts. This investment will help initiate a digital conversion project to convert 34,500 VHS tapes to a digital format, index videos, and expand community prevention training.

Court Backlog Continuation:

Commissioners Court approved \$18.6 million in funding for the continuation and expansion of Court Backlog reduction activities. The comprehensive set of initiatives includes the establishment of Emergency Response Dockets, hiring Associate Judges to expand trial capacity, adding staff across impacted departments, expanding jury services and facilities, expediting access to evidence, and continuing a triage program within the District Attorney's Office to review one-time, low-level offenses to quickly bring them to disposition.

COVID Community Housing Program (CCHP) 2.0:

Commissioners Court approved six agreements totaling \$29 million with local entities to fund scaling of housing interventions that have proven success in reducing the homelessness population. These initiatives have also reduced time experiencing homelessness, increased permanent housing options, and decreased encampments. The six awardees include:

- 1) The Coalition for the Homeless Houston/Harris County for Housing Services and Intermediary/Monitoring Services

- 2) The Coalition for the Homeless Houston/Harris County for Sole Source System Management
- 3) The Salvation Army for Greater Houston for PSH Preservation
- 4) A Caring Safe Place for CCHP 2.1 Program
- 5) Temenos CDC for Temenos Scattered Site
- 6) The Harris Center for Mental Health and IDD

CCHP and Re-entry evaluation services:

Commissioners Court approved CCHP and Re-entry evaluation services. The evaluator, American Institute for Research, will assess the impact of homelessness services provided as part of CCHP to understand how effective and equitable the program is and identify gaps in services and potential improvements. The evaluator will also help identify, source, and evaluate data to better understand the County's reentry population and manage local data related to those at risk of recidivating to jail or prison.

Behavioral Health:

11 programs to expand access to behavioral health services were approved by Commissioners Court, totaling \$14.3 million. These include counseling services for youth and families, treatment for substance use, and growing our behavioral health workforce.

Food & Nutrition:

4 transformative programs to address food insecurity and strengthen our food & nutrition infrastructure were approved by Commissioners Court, totaling \$7.5 million. These programs will enable and increase partnerships across entities, produce availability, and presence in food deserts.

Gun Buyback Events:

Commissioners Court approved a Gun buyback program that aims to lower gun violence by reducing the number of guns in civilian hands. The gun buyback events will allow gun owners to surrender personal firearms in exchange for gift cards. The program goals are to take unwanted firearms out of the community, thus reducing the potential for them to cycle through illegal networks or end up as potential hazards in the home. Personnel from the Harris County Sheriff's Office (HCSO) will collect weapons at the event, submit all weapons to be checked for lost and stolen reports, and submit all firearms for test firing and entry into the National Integrated Ballistic Information Network (NIBIN).

Voter Education & Outreach

Commissioners Court approved voter education and outreach services related to elections in 2022 and 2023 for branding, marketing, and strategic communication services. The purpose of this program is to execute a paid media campaign focused on educating voters in Harris County about election basics, including how to operate new voting machines, understand the new process for in-person and/or vote-by-mail.

ACTIVE PROJECTS

HEALTH PORTFOLIO
ACCESS Harris <p>Transformational technology investment bringing together County safety net departments with the purpose of coordinating care for vulnerable populations through shared data, goals, and strategies.</p> <p>Key Updates</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• First ACCESS Community meeting conducted with over 15 community-based agencies to discuss possible collaborations and partnerships• Team is focused on launching the first cohort with a violence prevention emphasis
Healthy Minds, Healthy Communities <p>Harris Center aims to empower community members with tools and training to support each other, strengthening community behavioral health and resiliency.</p> <p>Key Updates</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 1,927 participants engaged through 36 events held across 10 high-priority zip codes• 8,584 unique digital engagements to discuss behavioral health challenges and resources• Governmental and community leadership relationships under development across communities
Lead Abatement & Prevention <p>Expansion of existing lead abatement efforts. The program aims to protect children from lead poisoning and exposure in schools, childcare facilities, and homes. Blood and facility lead-level testing, along with acceleration of lead abatement of homes and child-occupied facilities in vulnerable communities, aims to improve health outcomes, enhance quality of life, and increase awareness of lead concerns.</p> <p>Key Updates</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Over 3,800 educational materials have been distributed at over 100 events• Purchasing award for Stracon Group Inc. approved for lead testing kit and accessories
Maternal & Child Health <p>This initiative aims to expand resource navigation of social and health benefits for new and expecting families through a systematic approach of care coordination, prenatal care, post-partum care, and infant-early child development. This program will provide the social support needs for black mothers and babies diminished during the pandemic.</p> <p>Key Updates</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Recruiting and hiring underway for 12 positions supporting the Maternal & Child Health Program
Neighborhood Nuisance Abatement <p>Program focused on the abatement of unsafe structures in Harris County neighborhoods that pose a health and safety risk to area residents including children. It is a public health response to violence in impacted communities that experienced pandemic-driven increases in rates of criminal activity.</p> <p>Key Updates</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A total of 62 orders to abate have been approved by Commissioners Court to-date• The team continues to prioritize unsafe structures posing health and safety risks to residents

HOUSING PORTFOLIO

COVID Community Housing Project 2.0 Support Services

CCHP seeks to permanently house people who are currently experiencing homelessness (e.g., living in shelters, encampments or on the streets) as well as those who may fall into homelessness because of the economic effects of the pandemic. This program is administered by the Coalition for the Homeless, which serves as the leader of the homeless response system for Harris, Fort Bend, and Montgomery Counties.

Key Updates

- Program evaluation of Homelessness and Reentry approved by Commissioners Court
- Over 1,425 unsheltered individuals engaged in case management services to assist with potential permanent supportive housing
- 889 emergency housing vouchers issued, and 346 individuals housed

Employ2Empower (E2E):

Workforce development program providing employment opportunities to Harris County's unsheltered population. The program provides steady income, wraparound services, and workforce development training, while connecting participants to a pathway to permanent housing solutions.

Key Updates

- Since August, the program has enrolled 23 participants and 17 have been referred to additional employment opportunities
- Program remains active in Precinct 2 with expansion to Precincts 1 and 3 began September 20th

Legal Aid

Harris County is funding legal aid services provided by Eviction Defense Coalition members to support families in eviction proceedings, ensuring households have access to a fair hearing and representation.

Key Updates

- Assistance provided to 3,223 individuals to-date

Rental Assistance

Harris County's rental assistance program helps vulnerable families remain housed while also supporting landlords with struggling tenants. The Houston-Harris County Emergency Rental Assistance Program has been nationally recognized for its effectiveness of fund distribution, accessibility, and outreach.

Key Updates

- Pledged or paid more than \$296 million in assistance to over 74,293 families

JOBS & EDUCATION PORTFOLIO

County Connections Summer Programming

Interlocal agreement with the Harris County Department of Education for the County Connections Youth Summer Initiative. Now in its second year, the initiative is expected to provide summer programming to 7,000 children ages 5-18 and address pandemic-related gaps in enrichment offerings.

Key updates

- HCDE selected 65 participating nonprofit organizations for this year's program

Digital Access

Investment in public wi-fi services at more than 100 community centers, libraries and parks, mobile wi-fi buses, LTE/5G and data services for students, and other digital access programs. Initially supporting remote learning, broadband efforts remain critical in bridging the digital divide.

Key updates

- Expansion has accelerated, with 17 sites recently completed and 31 now online
- Free Wi-Fi locations are listed at broadband.harriscountytexas.gov

Early Childhood

Three investments in early childhood will benefit Harris County children, families, and caregivers:

1. The Texas Children's Hospital upWORDS community-based training model will support infant and toddler brain and language development
2. The Safe Babies program from First3Years works with families and children within the child welfare system to minimize the harm of family separation and prior maltreatment
3. The Alliance's home-based childcare support program will provide training to home-based childcare providers, including helping unlicensed programs gain certification and increasing the quality of programming, care, and business operations

Key Updates

- 31 childcare professionals have been trained and 13 children have been served as of August 30th
- Added 42 childcare spots and 20 participants have enrolled as of August 15th

COUNTY OPERATIONS

Court Backlog

- Efforts to support reduction of the court backlog by expanding of jury services, increasing staff, establishing emergency response dockets, and accelerating evidence processing. The number of cases in the court backlog is defined as misdemeanors aged over 180 days or felony cases aged over 360 days.

Key Updates

- The number of misdemeanor cases in the backlog is down 20% from January 2022
- The number of felony cases in backlog status has declined by 16% since January 2022
- Commissioners Court approved continuation of funding through fiscal year 2023 to expand evidence retrieval activities and extending the District Attorney's triage project for an additional year

Court Backlog – County Jail

Commissioners Court approved a \$25.7 million agreement with Management & Training Corporation (MTC) to temporarily relocate Harris County Jail inmates to a correctional facility outside of Lubbock, Texas.

Harris County Violent Persons (VIPER) Task Force

Multi-agency initiative led by the Harris County Sheriff's Office (HCSO) in collaboration with Harris County Constable Offices (HCCO). The VIPER program aims to accelerate the prosecution and resolution of victims and reduction in violent crime by repeat offenders.

Key Updates

- Training of officers currently underway

COMPLETED PROJECTS

Child Tax Credit

ARPA temporarily increased the Child Tax Credit (CTC), providing a credit of up to \$3,600 per child under age 6 and \$3,000 per child ages 6 to 17. To help eligible families claim the CTC, the County approved a program for community outreach, non-filer form preparation assistance, and tax preparation assistance. Mobile tax assistance took the program directly into neighborhoods that needed it most. By the end of April, the credit had been claimed for 4,076 children and 8,950 households filed taxes, with a total expected benefit of both the CTC and the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) of \$13M.

Emergency Nursing

Over 602 nurses, respiratory therapists, and other medical staff were temporarily placed with 18 area hospitals in response to the Delta surge, with an additional 361 placed during the Omicron surge, substantially alleviating staffing shortages and providing critical support to patients. This program is now in the close-out stage, including final compliance monitoring.

Houston Food Bank

The labor services agreement allowed the Food Bank to hire a temporary workforce to assist with inventory and distribution, make home deliveries to seniors, and fill in for responsibilities normally covered by volunteers. To date, County funding has enabled the delivery of over 65 million meals during the pandemic.

Small Business Relief

LiftFund completed distribution of \$30 million in Small Business Relief Fund grants, assisting 2,577 small businesses. Final compliance reviews are currently underway.

Flexible Financial Assistance

The Harris County Recovery Assistance program administered by Catholic Charities has completed distribution of funds, with \$60 million in assistance provided to 40,000 families.

Vaccine Incentives

The countywide vaccine incentive offer ended at the end of September, after incentivizing more than 30,000 incremental vaccinations above baseline forecasts.

PORTFOLIO OVERVIEW

The current portfolio of projects managed via the ARPA governance process follows. A total of \$436.5 million has been allocated toward COVID relief from the ARPA Local Fiscal Recovery Funds, with additional funding approved in 2021 & 2022 from other COVID relief sources.

Funding Source	Focus Area	Project	Obligated (\$M)
Health			167.5
ARPA Local Fiscal Recovery Fund	COVID-19	Emergency Nursing	71.5
ARPA Local Fiscal Recovery Fund	Environmental Health	Lead Abatement and Prevention	20.0
ARPA Local Fiscal Recovery Fund	Behavioral Health	Behavioral Health Programs	14.3
ARPA Local Fiscal Recovery Fund	Coordinated Care	ACCESS Harris	14.2
ARPA Local Fiscal Recovery Fund	COVID-19	Vaccine Incentives	12.5
ARPA Local Fiscal Recovery Fund	Behavioral Health	Community Initiated Care	8.9
ARPA Local Fiscal Recovery Fund	Healthcare Access & Coverage	Maternal and Child Health	7.7
ARPA Local Fiscal Recovery Fund	Food & Nutrition	Food & Nutrition Programs	7.5
Response & Recovery	Food & Nutrition	Houston Food Bank Labor	3.9
ARPA Local Fiscal Recovery Fund	Crime Prevention through Environmental Design	Neighborhood Nuisance Abatement	2.5
ARPA Local Fiscal Recovery Fund	Health Portfolio	ARPA Administrative Resources	2.0
ARPA Local Fiscal Recovery Fund	Crime Prevention through Environmental Design	Engineering Resources	1.2
FLEX Fund	Crime Prevention through Environmental Design	Neighborhood Nuisance Abatement	0.5
ARPA Local Fiscal Recovery Fund	Behavioral Health and Food & Nutrition	Public Health contract administration	0.9
Housing			249.7
Consolidated Appropriations Act	Housing Stability	Emergency Rental Assistance 1	90.5
ARPA Emergency Rental Assistance	Housing Stability	Emergency Rental Assistance 2	71.4
ARPA Local Fiscal Recovery Fund	Homelessness	CCHP 2.0 PSH, RRH, and Diversion	35.0
ARPA Local Fiscal Recovery Fund	Homelessness	CCHP 2.1	29.0
ARPA Local Fiscal Recovery Fund	Homelessness	HAY Center Campus for Youth aging out of foster care	9.0
CARES	Housing Stability	Emergency Rental Assistance Bridge	4.2
ARPA Local Fiscal Recovery Fund	Water & Wastewater	Engineering Resources	2.7
ARPA Local Fiscal Recovery Fund	Homelessness	Employ2Empower Expansion	2.2
ARPA Local Fiscal Recovery Fund	Housing Stability	Affordable Housing Strategy & Program Mgmt	2.0
ARPA Local Fiscal Recovery Fund	Housing Portfolio	ARPA Administrative Resources	1.1
Response & Recovery	Housing Stability	Legal Aid	1.0
ARPA Local Fiscal Recovery Fund	Homelessness	CCHP & Re-entry Evaluation	0.7
ARPA Local Fiscal Recovery Fund	Homelessness	Homelessness Strategy	0.5
ARPA Local Fiscal Recovery Fund	Water & Wastewater	Drinking water and sanitary sewer feasibility studies	0.4
Jobs & Education			114.2
ARPA Local Fiscal Recovery Fund	Family Financial Stability	Harris County Recovery Assistance	65.4
ARPA Local Fiscal Recovery Fund	Small Business	Harris County Business Relief	32.1
ARPA Local Fiscal Recovery Fund	Child Care	Early Childhood Impact Fund Awards	7.9
Response & Recovery	Digital Access	Public WiFi & Student Home Broadband	2.2
FLEX Fund	Small Business	Disparity Study Fund	2.2
CARES	Digital Access	Public WiFi & Student Home Broadband	1.6
ARPA Local Fiscal Recovery Fund	Child Care	County Connections Summer Programming for Youth 2022	1.5
Response & Recovery	Child Care	County Connections Summer Programming for Youth 2021	0.7
ARPA Local Fiscal Recovery Fund	Family Financial Stability	Child Tax Credit Outreach	0.5
FLEX Fund	Child Care	Child Care Subsidy Enrollment Process Analysis	0.1
County Operations			83.4
ARPA Local Fiscal Recovery Fund	Justice & Safety	County Jail Capacity	25.7
ARPA Local Fiscal Recovery Fund	Justice & Safety	Court Backlog	19.0
ARPA Local Fiscal Recovery Fund	Justice & Safety	Court Backlog Continuation & DA Triage Project	18.6
ARPA Local Fiscal Recovery Fund	Admin	Strategy, Project Management, and Compliance	13.2
ARPA Local Fiscal Recovery Fund	Justice & Safety	Children's Assessment Center	1.5
ARPA Local Fiscal Recovery Fund	Justice & Safety	Harris County Violent Persons (VIPER) Task Force	2.6
ARPA Local Fiscal Recovery Fund	Justice & Safety	Voter Education & Outreach	2.5
ARPA Local Fiscal Recovery Fund	Admin	Outside Counsel	0.3
Total 2021 - 2022 Commitments			614.8
ARPA Local Fiscal Recovery Fund	All	All	436.5
Other Pandemic Recovery	All	All	178.3