

Louisiana Can Maximize American Rescue Dollars to Benefit Young Children

Overview:

The Louisiana Policy Institute for Children, Council for a Better Louisiana, Louisiana Budget Project, Louisiana Fair Housing Action Center, and Louisiana Partnership for Children and Families collaboratively examined how American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) dollars can be spent to benefit young children, birth to age 8, in Louisiana.

These organizations collectively put forth the following recommendations for consideration. For more information, refer to the full policy brief linked [here](#).

Child and Maternal Mental Health:

Developed by the [Louisiana Partnership for Children and Families](#)

- Invest \$1.7 million per year in 2022, 2023, and 2024 (\$5.1 million total) to build early childhood mental health infrastructure to increase capacity among medical providers, particularly in rural areas, and provide consultation services to existing medical providers who see children and postpartum women.
- Reform the use of social workers and school counselors in K-12 education to address mental health issues by focusing these roles on providing mental health services to students.
- Invest in better systems and policies to improve student health records which allow for increased payments in child health from Medicaid.
- Increase investments in maternal mental health by making voluntary home visiting services available to all families who want them.

Child Nutrition:

Developed by the [Louisiana Budget Project](#)

- Invest in accessible and user-friendly application systems to ensure that eligible families can get and maintain access to SNAP by redesigning online application systems, forms, and notices, and by improving capacity in the program's call center.
- Expand the Summer Food Service Program and afterschool meals that feed children all year long, even when school is out of session, and invest in program improvement efforts such as offering capacity-building grants to sponsoring organizations and sites, providing information sharing convenings and repositories, and disseminating marketing campaigns aimed at caretakers and community organizations.
- Ensure equitable access to child nutrition resources through investments in translation and accessibility improvements of public benefits applications (e.g. SNAP, Child Tax Credit, Economic Impact Payments, etc.), and targeted outreach to communities that have faced the greatest rates of child food insecurity and hunger during COVID-19.
- Streamline coordination between governmental and charitable sources of food aid to help mitigate the loss of other sources of help.



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Quality, Affordable Housing:

Developed by the [Louisiana Fair Housing Action Center](#)

- Invest \$10 million to help ensure families facing eviction have access to free legal representation, which could prevent thousands of evictions and generate \$30 million or more in savings on homelessness, healthcare, foster care, and incarceration spending.
- Provide emergency shelter in hotels for people experiencing homelessness as a pathway toward increased COVID-19 vaccinations and long-term affordable housing.
- Invest \$50 million in the Louisiana Housing Trust Fund to build 700 to 1,000 deeply affordable, new homes for the lowest-income families in the state who don't earn enough to afford rent.

Family Economic Stability:

Developed by the [Louisiana Budget Project](#)

- Increase the income threshold for working families eligible for the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) to 85% of state median income to support more working parents as they return to work.
- Provide a child care subsidy to every participant in the new MJ Foster Promise Program as they earn workforce credentials, including for up to one year following program completion.
- Ensure that all eligible families are receiving their monthly Child Tax Credit (CTC) payment by providing resources to parents who may not ordinarily file income tax returns.
- Pay Louisiana essential workers \$15 an hour using pandemic premium pay through 2026.
- Create an emergency paid leave fund that would offer 12 weeks of paid family and medical leave to all Louisiana essential workers through 2026. Such a program would ensure parents do not have to sacrifice pay or employment when they need to take parental leave or care for a sick family member.
- Increase state unemployment benefits to a minimum of \$300 a week through 2026 to ensure families experiencing unemployment can meet their needs as the pandemic continues.

Childhood Education and Development

Developed by the [Louisiana Policy Institute for Children](#) and the [Council for a Better Louisiana](#)

- Continue to support implementation of quality, aligned curriculum, assessments, and instruction through grade 3 by funding the purchase of high-quality curriculum; training teachers on curriculum and quality improvement initiatives; and providing regular coaching to staff to support implementation.
- Develop a comprehensive early reading program for schools to improve reading skills for students through grade 3, including literacy assessments for students in grades K-3, enhanced teacher preparation, targeted interventions, and quality textbooks and curricula.
- Support quality early care and education providers with increasing enrollment capacity through grants for improving and expanding existing facilities or acquiring additional facilities.
- Offer wage stipends to child care staff who are helping to keep the economy running in a field that experiences extremely high employee turnover.

