



April 13, 2021

President Joseph R. Biden
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Biden:

The National Coalition for Shared Safety is an alliance of critical assistance providers, crime victims, public health experts, and business leaders dedicated to advancing community safety solutions. We and our allies across the country thank you for championing and signing the American Relief Plan (ARP) into law. Based on our work across the country, we urge your administration to take two additional actions that will significantly increase the ARP's impact in the communities hardest hit by the health and economic devastation of the past year. As federal administering agencies are crafting solicitations and guidance for the ARP funds, we ask that they provide both *maximum guidance* and *maximum flexibility* to ensure that resources get to the people who have suffered the most during the past year, particularly in immigrant and low-income communities of color. These actions, which will be explained in more detail below, will not simply help your administration realize your vision of rescue and renewal. They will also help improve upon the CARES Act, which, despite its significant investments, did not make the kinds of intentional investments in violence reduction and safety that communities in crisis need, especially as many are dealing with severe increases in violence correlated with the pandemic.

To provide maximum guidance, we ask that federal administering agencies explicitly prioritize organizations that are based in and staffed by residents of the communities they serve and have an established history of providing effective safety solutions. This is particularly important as agencies' staff are drafting applications, guidance for state and local fiscal relief, behavioral health, and victim services funding opportunities. Proven safety solutions include programs grounded in prevention and public health like community violence intervention and interruption programming, assertive outreach, employment programming designed to reach individuals returning home from incarceration, substance abuse treatment, community-based victim support, reentry support, and trauma-informed mental health services like the Trauma Recovery Center. Additionally, the administration can more equitably reach communities hardest hit by COVID-19 by encouraging state and local governments to use recovery funds for effective interventions as part of their pandemic responses, such as scaling transitional jobs to employ individuals with a criminal record who are recently released from incarceration or have lost their jobs as a result of the pandemic. By providing this clear guidance, particularly in the Department of the Treasury and the Department of Health and Human Services, your administration will help communities address spikes in violent crime that have followed from the pandemic. It will also provide jobs to people who are closest to the violence and make essential investments in local public safety infrastructures.

To provide maximum flexibility, we ask that federal administering agencies' solicitations and guidance do all that is practically possible to accelerate bureaucratic processes and remove barriers that too often exclude critical assistance providers from accessing federal resources. Critical assistance providers is the term the National Coalition for Shared Safety uses to describe the proven solutions that organizations use to reduce violence and promote safety in communities in crisis, including trauma recovery, substance-abuse treatment, victim services, mental health care, community violence interruption, and reentry support. Critical assistance providers tend to be small, located in the communities they serve, and exclusively focused on providing services. While these features give organizations the proximity, credibility, and expertise required to work effectively with impacted people, they are typically associated with a lack of administrative capacity that is needed to secure federal funding. By instructing federal administering agencies to provide maximum flexibility, your administration will help direct the ARP funds to community-based initiatives that are best able to help people who are most harmed, but too often least helped by governmental resources.

As you remarked in your speech on the one-year anniversary of the coronavirus outbreak, the pandemic has caused "collective suffering" and brought "a year filled with the loss of life and the loss of living for all of us." At the same time, the pandemic has been particularly devastating for communities that were already suffering from concentrated disadvantages, such as high rates of unemployment, violence, a lack of supportive services, and the legacy of American racism.

In these communities, critical assistance providers, organizations that have a long history of standing in where the government has too often walked away. During the pandemic, the people who work for those organizations have gone above and beyond their normal work. Throughout the country, they have risked their own health and safety to serve as front-line workers, mediating conflicts and preventing violence, responding to crisis mental health needs during the pandemic, delivering food, PPE, and other essential services to people who lack access to vital resources. Critical assistance providers are the backbone of their communities. They represent the best of America, relentlessly dedicated to helping people they serve find, as you put it, "light in the darkness."

By taking these actions to provide maximum guidance and maximum flexibility to support these crucial community-based actors, your administration will deliver on the full promise of the American Rescue Plan, provide essential resources to these organizations, and be the government that these communities deserve.

On behalf of the National Coalition for Shared Safety, our member organizations, our allies, and the many crime victims, people with past convictions, and their families and communities who we represent, we urge you to implement these recommendations and strengthen our nation's most vulnerable communities during this time of crisis. By investing in policies and organizations that support the recovery of this community of individuals, we can increase equity and improve the safety, health, and economic security of all.

Sincerely,

