

Washington Update

COUNTY OF SANTA BARBARA

March 29, 2021

COVID-19 RELIEF

The *American Rescue Plan* was signed into law on March 11, 2021, and includes almost \$1.9 trillion for COVID-19 relief, including public health funding, direct assistance to businesses and individuals harmed by the economic downturn, and fiscal relief for states and local governments.

Under the legislation, \$65.1 billion is provided for direct payments to counties for fiscal relief. Recipients can use the funds to cover costs incurred by December 31, 2024. The funds will be distributed in two tranches, with 50 percent allocated no later than 60 days from the date of enactment, and the remainder allocated no earlier than one year later.

The State and Local Fiscal Relief provisions also include \$10 billion for a Coronavirus Capital Project Fund for projects such as broadband access. Revenue-sharing counties are also eligible for a separate \$1.5 billion fund. As a Payment in Lieu of Taxes recipient, the County of Santa Barbara qualifies as a revenue-sharing county, but those allocations will be targeted to areas experiencing economic distress.

VACCINATION FUNDING

On March 25, the Department of Health and Human Services announced a series of actions to expand access to COVID-19 vaccines in the highest risk communities. As part of this initiative, \$6 billion from the *American Rescue Plan* is being allocated to community health centers, including Federally Qualified Health Centers. The County of Santa Barbara is slated to receive \$5.2 million to be used to expand COVID-19 vaccinations, testing, and treatment for vulnerable populations; deliver preventive and primary health care services to people at higher risk for COVID-19; and expand health centers' operational capacity. The

Santa Barbara Neighborhood Clinics will also receive \$4.9 million.

The Centers for Disease Control is also distributing \$3 billion to support local health departments and community-based organizations to increase vaccine access, acceptance and uptake. Funding will be allocated through the state of California in accordance with the existing CDC immunization cooperative agreement.

SURFACE TRANSPORTATION PROGRAMS

Committees in the House and the Senate have begun the process of drafting a multi-year bill to reauthorize federal surface transportation programs. The legislation is needed to set funding levels and policies for highway, transit and rail programs. The *Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act* expired last year, but its provisions were extended through October to allow Congress more time to draft the next bill.

The House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure plans to draft its version of surface transportation reauthorization legislation in May. Chair DeFazio (D-OR) has indicated that the starting point for the legislation will be H.R. 2, the *Moving Forward Act*, which was passed by the House last July, but which was not taken up by the Senate during the 116th Congress. H.R. 2 proposed a \$494 billion reauthorization of surface transportation programs, which was then made the core of a larger effort to fund other forms of infrastructure. The process in the Senate is expected to be slower than the House but the Environment and Public Works Committee is hoping to draft the highway program provisions by this summer.

INFRASTRUCTURE

President Biden will travel to Pittsburgh on March 31, where he will release additional de-

tails on his infrastructure and economic program. The President's fiscal year 2022 budget proposal has not been sent to Congress yet, and additional details may be provided on those funding bills as well.

The infrastructure roll out is part of the Administration's emphasis on economic recovery now that the initial COVID-19 relief legislation has been signed into law. It is expected to total more than \$3 trillion and include transportation funding and a host of other infrastructure improvements. Education, workforce development, climate change mitigation and equity issues are also expected to be prominent. As was the case with the *American Rescue Plan*, the infrastructure package is likely to utilize the budget reconciliation process in order to achieve passage by the Senate.

IMMIGRATION

We contacted our House and Senate Delegation in support of legislation to provide comprehensive immigration reform. The House of Representatives passed H.R. 6, the *American Dream and Promise Act of 2021*, on March 18 to create a path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants who were brought to the United States as children. The House also passed H.R. 1603, the *Farm Workforce Modernization Act of 2021*, which would allow undocumented farmworkers to earn legal status and would also increase requirements for the electronic system to check employee work authorizations. Senator Durbin (D-IL) has reintroduced his S. 264, the *Dream Act of 2021*, with Senator Graham (R-SC) as the principal co-sponsor, but the Senate Judiciary Committee has not yet released a schedule for considering immigration legislation.

President Biden's proposed overhaul of immigration laws has been introduced by Senator Menendez (D-NJ) as S.348 and by Representative Sanchez (D-CA) as H.R. 1177. Under the legislation, immigrants who were in the Country as of January 1 would become eligible for legal permanent residence after five years and for U.S. citizenship after an additional

three years. Participants in the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program could apply for a green card immediately. The proposed legislation includes other revisions to the immigration process and an increase in refugee admissions. The legislation is likely to be opposed by most Republicans as too broad and lacking in border security measures.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN ACT

We are continuing to work with our House and Senate Delegation to support legislation to reauthorize the *Violence Against Women Act (VAWA)*. Grants through this legislation have helped local prosecutors and other law enforcement officials improve services and protections for victims of crime and helped change the way that the criminal justice system responds to domestic violence. VAWA expired in 2018 and the House recently passed H.R.1620, the *Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2021*, to extend and improve these programs.

*Don Gilcrest
Thomas Walters & Associates, Inc.*