



November 3, 2021

To: Boulder County Commissioners Matt Jones, Claire Levy, and Marta Loachamin
cc: Michelle Krezek and Mark Ruzzin

Re: ARPA Spending

Dear Boulder County Commissioners,

As you deliberate on the distribution of Boulder County's allocation of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds, we start by thanking you for your extensive outreach to the community in order to better understand the most critical needs in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic. We especially appreciate your emphasis on reaching a broad cross-section of the community, including the voices of those who are too often overlooked. The Northwest Chamber Alliance was honored to be one of the partner agencies supporting these efforts alongside Boulder County.

The Northwest Chamber Alliance was formed in 2016 as a coalition focused on regional issues that impact economic vitality and quality of life. It currently comprises the Boulder Chamber, Broomfield Chamber of Commerce, Lafayette Chamber of Commerce, Latino Chamber of Boulder County, LGBTQ Chamber of Commerce of Boulder County, Louisville Chamber of Commerce, Longmont Area Chamber of Commerce, and Superior Chamber of Commerce. Collectively, these chambers of commerce *represent approximately 3,800 businesses* - ranging from large international corporations to small businesses, startups, nonprofits and public institutions – and over 390,000 employees.

As business and economic development leaders in Colorado, the mission of NWCA members is to help our local communities and economies thrive. Alongside the physical health and safety of Coloradans is their important economic health. Investments in both will be critical to moving through this challenging time as quickly as possible. You have difficult decisions to make as you assess how to best utilize Boulder County's \$63,359,749 in allocated ARPA funds. As the voice of businesses in Boulder County and beyond, the Northwest Chamber Alliance urges you to focus on the major structural issues that are impeding - and will continue to hinder - our recovery efforts. Specifically, *we encourage the Boulder County Commissioners to use ARPA dollars to:*

1. Increase affordable workforce housing access;
2. Invest in much-needed infrastructure projects;
3. Leverage state funds to enhance early childhood programs;
4. Develop our workforce.

Housing First. The number one concern we hear from our members is the need for more attainable workforce housing. We won't reiterate the data or the negative impacts that a lack of affordable and diverse housing imposes on low, moderate, and middle-income families. We are sure you also are well aware of the range of individual and societal issues - from employment limitation and transportation burdens to education achievement gaps and civic participation constraints – that are a consequence of high housing costs. The Northwest Chamber Alliance urges you to focus ARPA dollars on specific projects that provide a diversity of housing options, locations, and prices, including both rental and ownership opportunities, that will provide our workforce with the opportunity to live and work locally.

We know housing already is a recognized priority, with a variety of measures in place, and we understand it was the dominant community concern reflected in your ARPA survey responses. Still, we feel it is necessary to reiterate at a time when we have available resources to achieve transformational progress. As you consider the most effective ways to increase accessible housing supply, please consider the following:

- Find ways to get to yes. Housing authorities and other housing developers are already facing unprecedented challenges from supply chain delays, labor shortages, and inflation, not to mention the financial hits that the pandemic precipitated. *Finding ways to get to yes on housing means making the entitlement process more efficient and encouraging the flexibility to implement out of the box strategies.* This might include parking variances for walkable communities, encouraging micro-apartments, or other yet to be identified cutting-edge strategies.
- Leverage funds. The money Boulder County received from the federal government will disappear fast, but there are many ways to stretch these critical dollars. Along those lines, *we encourage you to pursue public-private partnerships along with matching dollars from the state and federal government sources.* DOLA, DOH, and other government agencies are offering innovative financing opportunities right now, such as the Housing Development Loan Fund (HDLF), which Boulder County should position itself to secure.
- Engage partners. As community leaders and business sector representatives for Boulder County and beyond, we stand ready to convene and involve the private sector as constructive participants and partners with the public and nonprofit sectors in achieving our mutual housing goals. *Please take advantage of this opportunity for partnership in identifying projects, stretching dollars, and engaging the broader community.*

Infrastructure Foundation. While housing is a high priority, we have long argued that our economy rests on a solid infrastructure foundation. There are few better ways to immediately stimulate a quick economic recovery than to invest in transportation, communication, and social infrastructure.

- **Mobility Investments.** On the transportation front, Boulder County and partner transit services are well prepared in their planning with many shovel-ready projects that are prime targets for investment. Example projects include major multi-modal enhancement for the Diagonal Highway 119 and State Highway 7. Mobility expenditures have the added benefit of creating a place for certain displaced workers to land, giving them a chance to earn a living wage during a period of economic transition. Further, the cost of living in Boulder County has forced thousands of lower-wage workers to outlying areas, such as Frederick, Firestone, and Dacono. As you consider worthy transportation investments for ARPA dollars, we encourage you to identify effective projects that will ease mobility between Boulder County and underserved workforce population centers to the east.
- **Fiber Connections.** While many workers must be physically present for their jobs, an increasing number have the opportunity to work from home. There are many benefits to this advancement in remote work opportunities, including reduced vehicle trips, increased labor efficiency, and enhancing mental and emotional health. We also note the growing opportunity our local businesses are finding for expanding their reach through online sales and services. Unfortunately, due to fiber infrastructure limitations and costly access fees, reliable high-speed internet service is out of reach of many residents and businesses. We urge you to support this business operations and workforce trend by investing in fiber infrastructure and low-cost access programs that make this critical infrastructure ubiquitous across Boulder County. In particular, we recommend that you partner with the private sector and/or our housing authorities to help identify the most cost-effective fiber infrastructure and access investments.
- **Childcare Services.** Finally, we have long recognized the need for enhanced access to affordable early childhood programs, and the pandemic has only underscored the importance of efforts in that area. Access to affordable childcare has many proven social and emotional benefits, and it is also good for business. Over half of parents in your survey reported missing work opportunities due to lack of childcare access or affordability. We also urge you to support Family, Friend, and Neighbor (NFF) childcare providers with any licensing and processing to expand their services to low-income workers and communities of color. The state of Colorado has already allocated \$472 million dollars to help fund early childhood, with \$275 million of that to be spent in the next eight months with a target support for childcare providers in the form of non-competitive stabilization grants. The Northwest Chamber Alliance urges you to partner with state officials in helping to secure this funding for our region.

Workforce Development. Finally, The Northwest Chamber Alliance recommends that you spend ARPA funding on workforce development and retention. We believe the structural issues addressed above will make a meaningful impact on our workforce in the long-term, but our businesses need to recruit and retain workers *now*. The Northwest Chamber Alliance encourages you to help fund and promote workforce apprenticeships as a way to connect employers and job seekers looking for new opportunities, including green jobs. Registered apprenticeships provide a critical talent pipeline that can help to address some of our nation’s pressing workforce challenges. We stand ready to act as facilitators for apprenticeships by helping to identify programs or by facilitating community partnerships together. Further, small businesses,

many of which are owned by people of color and women, are struggling to afford the increasingly expensive workforce. We encourage you to offer grants to small businesses that will help overcome those increased labor costs and other barriers to recovery from the pandemic.

Over the last two years, we've all had front row seats to what happens when businesses suffer. Workers lose jobs, families struggle to pay rent, food insecurity skyrockets, homelessness increases, vacancy rates go up, mental health suffers, and so on. Let's put our ARPA funding to good use by ensuring that businesses and their workforces have the physical and social resources they need to recover and thrive.

Thank you for your consideration of this input and please contact us if there are questions regarding the specific recommendations outlined here.

With Gratitude,

John Tayer
President & CEO



Sam Taylor
President & CEO



Vicki Trumbo
Executive Director



Rachel Garcia
Board of Directors



Scott Beard
Advisory Board



Scott Cook
CEO



Amber Thiel
Executive Director



Deana Miller
Executive Director

