

Alderman Murphy, Chair

Alderman Spiker, Vice Chair

Alderman Kovac, Alderwoman Coggs, and Alderwoman Zamarripa

I am writing this letter to the committee members as you are considering file #210547 at the special committee meeting on September 2, 2021. This file is for the appropriation of the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds for the City of Milwaukee Stronger Summer Plan or Mayor Barrett's plan. AFSCME Council 32 and the City of Milwaukee AFSCME locals support many of the initiatives in this plan, however there are some significant pieces that we believe are missing.

The ARPA legislation passed at the federal level included specific provisions for Premium Pay up to \$13.00 per hour for essential workers, including back pay to the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic. The general city employees that are front-line essential workers have been working for 18+ months through this pandemic, often putting themselves at risk of contracting Covid-19 so that the work of the City gets done. In 2020 when CARES Act funding was available, the City put together a plan to pay front-line essential workers an additional \$3.13 per hour, roughly \$25 per day in hazard pay. Eligible workers were identified, and a hazard pay policy was created and instituted. The various departments that had essential workers then began paying out this hazard pay. Just days after the policy went into effect, a decision by the US Department of Treasury deemed the only employees eligible for hazard pay under the CARES Act were those directly responding to Covid-19. For the City of Milwaukee this meant only certain employees in the Health Department and all Police and Fire Department employees. Hazard pay was swiftly ended for all other general city employees strictly because those costs could not be paid for with the grant money. The ARPA funds that the city is receiving give the opportunity to remedy this situation and provide equity to those other front-line general city employee essential workers. Sadly, the Mayor's proposal ignores this provision in ARPA. AFSCME urges the committee and the Common Council members to include this provision when allocating the ARPA funds.

A second omission in the Mayor's plan for spending the ARPA funds is to use the funds for incentivizing Covid-19 vaccinations. As I am sure you are aware, the Mayor has directed DER to create a policy for mandatory vaccinations for general city employees. This policy was created by DER with no input from employees or any labor groups that represent general city employees. The policy was released to the media and a notice was sent out to all general city employees via email. Only after hours of confusion and many questions from employees to their department HR reps and management did labor groups finally receive a notice of Meet and Confer meetings for this new policy. In addition, these meetings are scheduled for a week after the policy goes into effect on September 1st. AFSCME is supportive of the vaccine and has been advising members to get their shots. AFSCME hopes that an incentive approach would be used prior to a mandate and potential actions against employees that do not comply with the mandate. We believe the ARPA funds are an opportunity to provide incentives to general city employees not only to get their shots before the mandate, but also to make those incentives equitable for employees that made the decision to protect themselves and the public that they serve by getting the vaccine prior to the mandate. AFSCME urges the committee and the Common Council members to include equitable vaccine incentives when allocating the ARPA funds.

AFSCME hopes that we can count on your support of general city employees that are front-line essential employees. These employees have kept the city running despite great risks to their and their family's health. You can show your support by making some changes to the Mayor's plan for the ARPA funds and including both hazard pay and equitable vaccine incentives.

Thank you for your consideration,

Mark Pelzek

Vice President, AFSCME Council 32

President, AFSCME Local 47