



Project ABLE is a statewide coalition of AIDS service providers, advocates, and people living with HIV/AIDS & HCV mobilizing to advocate for HIV and harm reduction funding in the Massachusetts state budget.

TESTIMONY OF PROJECT ABLE ON AMERICAN RESCUE ACT (APRA) FUNDING

JOINT COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS

OCTOBER 5, 2021

Chairmen Michlewitz and Rodrigues and Members of the House and Senate Ways and Means Committees:

We are writing on behalf of Project ABLE, the statewide coalition of HIV/AIDS service providers, advocates, and people with HIV/AIDS.

HIV/AIDS service organizations are not only managing clients with HIV/AIDS, hepatitis C (HCV), behavioral health needs, and substance use problems, they are on the frontlines of the COVID-19 epidemic in testing, vaccine education and administration, and contact tracing.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated workforce shortages in this provider community, making it difficult for agencies to recruit and retain a whole range of staff including behavioral health staff, community health workers, case managers, client services staff, public health outreach workers, and clinical staff.

The HIV/AIDS provider agencies are **not** yet part of the rate-setting system in place for many health and human services workers, and therefore do not get rate increases through the state rate-setting system. They are dependent on salary and benefit increases through their contracts with the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, which are typically funded through the HIV/AIDS Line Item (4512-0103). Because there has not been any significant financial investment in this workforce for years, HIV/AIDS providers are hindered in their ability to recruit and retain staff, and this has become especially acute since these same providers have taken on COVID-19 related responsibilities.

Project ABLE has two requests:

1) Project ABLE requests that \$15 million of ARPA funding to specifically strengthen the HIV/AIDS workforce which has taken on additional responsibilities related to COVID-19, behavioral health, and substance use. Without an infusion of funding for the health care workforce, HIV/AIDS agencies will be limited their ability to integrate these service areas to fulfill their public health responsibilities and serve their communities adequately.

The \$15 million would be used to recruit, retain, and pay approximately 50 behavioral health staff (social workers, substance abuse counselors, mental health counselors, etc.) and 90 community health staff (community health workers, public health outreach workers, etc.).

2) Project ABLE also requests that HIV/AIDS providers are included in any other broader health and human services workforce initiatives that may be funded with APRA money, such as bonus pay, recruitment and retention incentives, marketing campaigns, loan forgiveness programs, and salary



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increases (keeping in mind that HIV/AIDS providers are currently not part of the state's rate-setting system).

Please let Mary Ann Hart know if you have any questions or would like more detailed information. She can be reached at maryann.hart@hartgovrelations.com and 617-797-8488.

Sincerely,

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