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
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.

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,

Carol Sciortino (signed on behalf of 5 others below)
Executive Vice-President for External Affairs
Fenway Health
75 Amory Street
Boston, MA 02119
857-313-6572
csciortino@fenwayhealth.org
https://fenwayhealth.org/
https://aac.org/

Gary K. Daffin, Executive Director
Multicultural AIDS Coalition
7 Palmer Street
Roxbury, MA 02119
gdaffin@mac-boston.org
Tel  617.238.2401
Cell  617.840.8604
https://www.mac-boston.org/

Cheryl Zoll, PhD, CEO
Tapestry Health
1985 Main Street #202
Springfield MA 01103
czoll@tapestryhealth.org
Tel: 413-586-2016
https://www.tapestryhealth.org/
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.

Michelle Smith, Executive Director
AIDS Project Worcester
165 Southbridge St.
Worcester, MA 01608
msmith@aidsprojectworcester.org
Tel: 508-755-3773
https://www.aidsprojectworcester.org/

John Gatto, Senior Vice President for Community Health
Justice Resource Institute (JRI), Inc.
160 Gould St. Suite 300
Needham Heights, MA 02494
jgatto@jri.org
Tel: 781-559-4900
https://jri.org/

Meg von Lossnitzer, Director
Victory Prevention | Victory Programs, Inc.
29 Stanhope St.
Boston, MA 02116
MPT: 617-927-0836 x186 | BLC: 617-236-1012 x186
mvonlossnitzer@vpi.org
www.vpi.org
https://www.vpi.org/boston/
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.