

MEMORANDUM

Date: May 14, 2021

To: Bethany Patten, Associate Director, Office of Early Childhood, IDHS
Lesley Schwartz, Bureau Chief of Early Childhood Development, Division of Family & Community Services, IDHS

From: Ireta Gasner, Vice President, Illinois Policy, Start Early

Re: **Use of American Rescue Plan Act funds for the Maternal Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting program (MIECHV)**

The following details Start Early's recommendations for the initial allocation of the \$1,144,428 in American Rescue Plan Act funds available to MIECHV to spend from 5/01/2021 to 9/30/2023. Recommended expenses are organized by priority level, and in the sequence in which funds should be spent down to maximize benefits to MIECHV families and the Illinois home visiting system. In addition to ARPA dollars earmarked for MIECHV, additional pools of federal funding could support the home visiting system more broadly. The State should identify other flexible ARPA funds, or other state funds that could support similar investments in non-MIECHV funded home visiting programs for the purpose of equity and cross-funder parity. Specific additional sources of funding could include the TANF Emergency Fund, the Coronavirus State Fiscal Recovery Fund and the Coronavirus Local Fiscal Recovery Fund.

Start Early has also already submitted recommendations for the broader early childhood care and education workforce funding under ARPA and while we know that the breadth of those funds may be limited by federal guidance, many of the same needs and pressures apply to the home visiting workforce. Therefore, we encourage the use of those funds be utilized to address workforce credentialing and degree attainment, compensation, and paid internship/mentoring opportunities.

I. Fund recruitment activities across a range of allowable use categories.

- Start Early recommends that ARPA funds prioritize recruitment activities. As MIECHV enrollment data show a significant decline in the number of newly enrolled and continuing pregnant women in programming during the period of July – December 2020 as compared to the same period the year prior, ARPA funded recruitment activities should specifically aim to increase prenatal enrollment in MIECHV programming.
- In allocating additional funds to support recruitment, Start Early would elevate the opportunity to apply an equity-informed lens and investigate strategies for family-centered recruitment. This may include evaluating existing or new referral partnerships, working with Coordinated Intake to understand how the recruitment experiences of families and programs may have shifted during the pandemic, or building on virtual engagement strategies developed by programs in the last year.
- Use emergency supplies via in-person diaper drives (and provide additional material supports) at outdoor, in-person recruitment events. Leverage allowable expenses under *5) Emergency supplies* and *7) Prepaid grocery cards* at these events for enrolled families as a strategy to re-engage and connect with families who may have fallen off more regular engagement with their home visitor throughout the pandemic, or to families with elevated and emergent basic needs.
- In line with allowable expenses under *6) Diaper bank coordination*, MIECHV should coordinate to purchase emergency supplies from diaper banks as feasible, to host in-

person outdoor recruitment events that provide diapering supplies to enrolled families in MIECHV communities.

- In addition to providing basic supplies to enrolled families, these events should aim to inform families of the availability of in-person services, per forthcoming cross-funder guidance.
- Events should also publicize available ARPA economic security benefits available to families (Child Tax Credit and Earned Income Tax Credit expansion, SNAP and WIC benefits, etc.)
- Per the award instructions from HRSA, under *1) Service Delivery*, funds may support service delivery including “service expansion to new families.” Additionally, under *2) Hazard pay or other staff costs*, funds may support additional staff costs associated with “other activities related to building staff and program capacity.” Under this category, programs could support overtime pay or additional staff costs to staff supporting in-person recruitment activities in MIECHV communities to drive service expansion and family engagement.
- Additionally, targeting recruitment activities for MIECHV-eligible families in communities with Coordinated Intake could boost enrollment systemwide, if MIECHV programs reach capacity and funnel eligible families to other community programs.

II. Provide PPE to families returning to in-person visits and to staff.

- As services return to in-person delivery, provide MIECHV participants with “face mask and other personal protective equipment” and “hand soap and hand sanitizer,” to support safe participation in in-person home visits as allowable under *5) Emergency supplies*.
- Under *1) Service Delivery*, ensure that all MIECHV programs have funds to purchase PPE for staff including masks and hand sanitizer to participate safely in in-person visits.
- For newly enrolling families unable to participate in in-person activities and facing technology barrier to participating in virtual activities, MIECHV should leverage allowable expenses under *7) Technology* to purchase tablets, cell phones, minutes, and internet access to enable families to participate in virtual home visits, as necessary.

III. For programs under capacity due to staff turnover, support hiring and trainings costs.

- Recognizing the initial allocation of ARPA funds is small relative to the typical MIECHV award, if funds remain after the above immediate priority expenses, Start Early would recommend MIECHV fund hiring activities including potential hiring incentives, including one-time hiring bonuses, to build back program capacity to support full caseloads.
- As funds for this award must be spent before September 30, 2023, the need for additional hiring support could be assessed as families return to in-person services and staff turnover returns to closer to pre-pandemic levels.
- Under *2) Hazard pay or other staff costs*, specifically “planning, hiring and onboarding additional staff,” and *3) Home visitor training*, Start Early would encourage MIECHV to plan for additional funds to support the training of new hires, particularly to cover the fees associated with training new HFA and PAT staff. In the event of an influx of new hires, additional hiring costs, including HFA training fees (\$150 per attendee, plus roughly \$50 for the HFA manual) as well as PAT fees (between \$520-\$583 per attendee, depending on the track) would need to be supported through the Start

- Early Professional Learning Network MIECHV contract. Additional funding may also be needed to support new staff attendance at PLN -provided wrap around trainings.
- Start Early would elevate the opportunity to begin laying the groundwork under 3) *Home visitor training*, to advance trauma-informed learning experiences through a virtual platform by beginning to build capacity for NEAR@Home integration to support the MIECHV home visitors in Illinois, and to additionally articulate how NEAR can be leveraged and complement the existing array of other social emotional supports in the Illinois system.
 - o The NEAR@Home Facilitated Learning process leverages relationship focused, trauma sensitive facilitators, fluent in infant mental health concepts and processes who model self-regulation, co-regulation, spacious listening, and reflective processes to walk with home visitors and supervisors through learning how to do a NEAR home visit. Recognizing that HRSA intends to issue an additional round of ARP awards in early FY2022 to continue to support recipients in responding to ongoing COVID-19 related needs, including the expansion of services for families, this first round of funding could support work to establish a facilitation team, along with the process for mentorship for new facilitators. This would require funds for two NEAR@Home Facilitated Learning experiences with MIECHV programs. Further expansion of this work to build a cadre of facilitators throughout state to support the MIECHV workforce to address Neuroscience, Epigenetics, ACEs, and Resilience¹ in context of home visiting interactions could continue under subsequent awards.

¹ This acronym references Neuroscience, Epigenetics, ACEs, and Resilience (NEAR).