

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

November 16, 2021

Dear Conference Committee Members,

I applaud the progress of the Massachusetts State Legislature in advancing legislation to make much-needed investments to support families, workers, and communities across the Commonwealth. By passing the American Rescue Plan Act, my colleagues and I in Congress and the Massachusetts delegation provided the Commonwealth with billions in federal relief funding to support our shared constituents. I strongly urge you to take advantage of this once-in-a-generation opportunity to prioritize equity and center the needs of our most vulnerable communities in Massachusetts.

As Congresswoman for the Massachusetts 7th Congressional District, I represent communities that are as diverse as they are unequal and that were among the hardest hit by the COVID-19 public health crisis. Boston, Cambridge, Somerville, Chelsea, Everett, Milton, and Randolph, are home to some of the greatest inequities in health outcomes, economic opportunity, and other quality of life indicators. Black, Latinx, Asian, and Indigenous residents in my district were already experiencing undue hardship as a result of generations of systemic racism and underinvestment, and the ongoing pandemic has only exacerbated those problems. Because we have borne a disproportionate burden of the coronavirus pandemic, it is critical that the Massachusetts State Legislature take advantage of the flexibility in these federal funds to target significant investments directly to our hardest hit communities.

There is an undeniable need to prioritize health equity. Black, Latinx, Indigenous, and immigrant communities are disproportionately represented among COVID-19 cases and deaths, and at the height of the pandemic, the death rates for Black individuals were nearly twice as high as the death rate of their white counterparts. Black and Latinx communities have been at increased risk of hospitalization, face greater barriers to testing and vaccinations, and, in my district, make up the majority of frontline workers who were at risk for increased exposure to the virus. Even in the absence of COVID-19, people of color are more likely to have chronic health conditions and lack affordable access to quality health care. This is a problem that can be fixed by centering equity and directing investments to address the ongoing COVID pandemic response—including ongoing testing and vaccination efforts and broader health issues like the maternal health crisis, community health center expansion, substance use and recovery programs, and expanding access to mental health supports.

Additionally, women, Black and Latinx workers and small business owners were disproportionately hurt by the pandemic-induced economic recession. I have heard from unemployed residents who lost their jobs or were forced to leave the workforce altogether to care for their loved ones or manage their own health conditions. These folks, who are disproportionately Black and brown, deserve relief and real workforce development

opportunities that pair the incredible talent of our residents with careers that offer living wages and economic security. Similarly, owners of small businesses in the Massachusetts 7th are still struggling to stay afloat. Hence, it is incumbent upon the Conference Committee to ensure funding from the federal government is allocated to support both workers and small business owners. Funding for minority-owned businesses, small business relief grants, and unemployment insurance are essential components of legislation that recognizes equity in our economic recovery as a necessity.

Furthermore, communities of color have been deliberately and systematically excluded from homeownership for generations. Presently, the Black homeownership rate is at its lowest level in over 50 years. The skyrocketing cost of rent is displacing Black and brown families who have lived in their neighborhoods for generations. In Massachusetts, a minimum wage worker must work 87 hours a week to afford a one-bedroom rental home. Safe, stable housing is the foundation upon which families can build full lives, but inequity has meant Black and brown families are excluded from that reality. I implore you to advance housing equity by including meaningful, robust, and targeted investments in affordable housing and pathways to homeownership for historically marginalized communities.

As you work to finalize the conference report, it is critical that equity and transparency remain top priorities. Our constituents are looking to the State Legislature to advance investments that will support all families, businesses, and communities across the Commonwealth. It is critical that the Commonwealth ensure transparent and publicly accessible ways to track the disbursement of funds to ensure that all communities—particularly Black, Brown and other historically marginalized residents are able to access resources.

In this moment, we cannot afford to go back to the pre-COVID-19 status quo “normal,” because that normal was unjust to begin with. I urge you to continue your steadfast commitment to passing legislation that will create a healthy and prosperous Massachusetts and set the groundwork for an equitable recovery for all. I look forward to continuing to be a partner and ally in this work at the federal level.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Ayanna S. Pressley". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being the most prominent.

Ayanna Pressley
Member of Congress

cc:

The Honorable Speaker of the House of Representatives, Ronald Mariano
The Honorable President of the Senate, Karen Spilka