

**Statement to Pittsburgh City Council**  
**Regarding the allocation of American Rescue Plan funding**  
Pittsburgh Human Rights City Alliance  
July 11, 2021

On behalf of our network of residents and community organizations, we remind City Council members that this Council made a decision in April 2011 to use a human rights framework to guide its policies. In light of that, we urge you to ***pause the vote on the Peduto administration's proposed allocation of American Rescue Plan Act funds to make space for a transparent process that enables participation by residents and a more thoughtful consideration of our community's priorities and needs.*** We believe this emergency federal funding creates an unprecedented opportunity for us to “build back better,” but it will require a far more inclusive and equitable process than the highly secretive and rushed process this administration has pursued. We also write to remind you of past commitments and obligations that must be considered as we decide how these federal resources will be used.

In allocating these funds ***we must put those furthest behind first*** so that we can know that all will be protected. We should be directing these funds to **building the social and physical infrastructure to help care for and protect** not just those with the most political voice, but those whose voices are marginalized by the compounded impacts of systemic racism and social exclusion. We remind this Council of prior reports and recommendations documenting the city's priorities and needs. These must determine the allocation of ARPA funds:

- The 2019 analysis of the City's Gender Equity Commission, [Pittsburgh's Inequality across Gender and Race](#) indicates that racial and gender equity need to be primary concerns when considering how to allocate these funds;
- The Affirmatively Forwarding Fair Housing Task Force's 2018 [Recommendations](#) are key to addressing barriers and disparities in access to housing that have exacerbated the pandemic's impact on our communities;
- In April 2020 the City's Gender Equity Commission produced an analysis of community needs made more urgent by the pandemic. The report, [Building an Equitable New Normal](#), highlighted the need for a gender analysis in budgeting, paid sick leave provisions and affordable childcare, among other recommendations;
- During 2019, numerous community organizations worked with the City's Gender Equity Commission and Commission on Human Relations to hold a series of community forums assessing human rights in the region. These resulting report to the United Nations, [Racial Inequity at the Core of Human Rights Challenges in Pittsburgh](#), documented racial inequities and democratic deficits and made recommendations for improving our City's compliance with international human rights obligations and expectations.

We remind Council members that this body has, in response to pressure from City residents, made commitments to addressing racial inequities and reversing the impacts of systemic racism. Specifically:

- On the eve of this pandemic, in December 2019, Pittsburgh’s city council signed an **ordinance declaring racism a public health crisis** recognizing that the health of all residents depends upon targeted efforts to eliminate racial health gaps;
- In 2016, Pittsburgh City Council [passed an ordinance](#) committing to “uphold the principles of the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)”;
- In 2016, Pittsburgh joined **Government Alliance on Race and Equity** (2016) and has committed to a process of advancing racial equity and improving opportunities for residents of color;
- In April 2011, this City Council named Pittsburgh the fifth Human Rights City in the United States, becoming part of a global movement of cities for human rights.

***We’re calling for a process that will enable an intentional and thoughtful integration of these commitments and past recommendations into the ARPA budget allocations.***

The American Rescue Plan Act creates an unprecedented opportunity for this City to address long-standing racial inequities that continue to bring disproportionate harms to Black residents and other residents of color and hold our city back by denying everyone the opportunities to contribute their skills and energy to building our community.

Pittsburgh can be a leader in helping address systemic racial disparities while re-building our community. The urgent needs of our time require far more participation and creative dialogue aimed at finding new ways to devote shared resources that can remedy and repair past harms.

Nationally and globally, there are urgent calls for addressing racial exclusions and institutionalized racism, and we cannot continue to ignore the ways these inequities are reproduced in political processes reflected in this administration’s proposal for allocating ARPA funds.

In January 2021, the Biden administration issued the [Executive Order On Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities](#) calling for a “whole-of-government equity agenda that matches the scale of the opportunities and challenges that we face.” We call for this to be reflected in our process of ARPA funds allocation.

Finally, we want to inform this Council that the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights recently issued an ["Agenda towards transformative change for racial justice and equality"](#), calling on all governments to adopt a “transformative agenda” to uproot systemic racism. The international community is calling on all governments to:

- Reverse the cultures of denial to dismantle systemic racism and accelerate the pace of action; (par. 68a)
- Ensure the active and meaningful participation and representation of people of African descent, including women of African descent and their organizations in State institutions; (par. 21, 68c)

- Seize opportunities to advance the anti-racism agenda, prioritize attaining racial equity in implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and ensure that people of African descent are not left behind; (par. 23)
- Improve support for mental health care and treatment and reduce reliance on police to intervention of law enforcement as first responders in mental health crises; (par. 30)
- Invest in sustainable, cross-cutting programmes that reduce inequalities and end discrimination in education, employment, health care and housing, as well as in effective strategies to reduce gun violence; (par. 39)
- Address the root causes of criminality and the compounding effects of systemic racism and focus on crime prevention; (par. 39)

The international community has called upon all people to work towards translating this global ["Agenda towards transformative change for racial justice and equality"](#) into action plans and concrete measures for change. In particular, there is a need to reimagine policing while considering the intersections of economic and social rights and their links to political rights and inclusion, as well as their contributions to today's multiple crises of public health, environmental sustainability, and racial polarization and conflict.

We join with other residents to call on our elected officials to reflect the demands of your constituents and the calls from national and global leaders to make space for inclusive and thoughtful public engagement on our priorities and needs as well as our visions for new ways forward that can address urgent needs and confront systemic racism to build a city that serves the needs of all of us.

Sincerely,

Jackie Smith, Co-Coordinator, [Pittsburgh Human Rights City Alliance](#)