



March 23, 2021

Dear Governor Gianforte and 2021 Legislators,

Covid has been and remains difficult across Montana and for many Montanans. Montanans remain optimistic for the success of Governor Gianforte’s Comeback plan. Senator Fitzpatrick’s SB 68 now signed into law is a good start by shielding businesses, health care providers, nonprofit organizations, and places of worship from coronavirus-related lawsuits, provided they take measures to protect individuals from COVID-19 and follow public health guidelines. There are a number of other initiatives including further elimination of business equipment tax, grants, and loans focusing on Montana businesses.

The 2021 Montana Legislature along with Governor Gianforte and his staff are developing a comprehensive plan to implement the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) in Montana. The plan developing in this session provides the framework allowing the Montana economy to “Comeback” strong.

The ARPA funds allow states to provide premium pay (up to \$13 per hour in addition to base pay, up to a \$25,000 cap) to state, territory, or tribal government workers who perform essential work during the public health emergency, or provide grants to employers with employees who perform essential work (defined as work needed to maintain continuity of operations of critical infrastructure and other sectors designated by the governor as critical to protect the health and well-being of residents). These essential workers have been the engine to keep Montana moving and safe during this pandemic. These essential workers are the essential building blocks to have a successful “Comeback” plan.

Montana Nurses Association (MNA) and all of our professional unions in Montana support and advocate for all workers, union or not, and understand that decisions will be made soon about where the ARPA monies will be allocated in Montana, and we ask that you make this premium funding dedicated specifically to ALL the essential employees in Montana, and list this support of all essential workers as a priority in your decision-making process. We are all asking the Governor, with support from Montana lawmakers, to take the steps needed to ensure that the funds are designated to these employees, and ensure that they will go to these essential workers. These funds designated to these employees will help us all support the workers in Montana and not leave them in a space where they cannot provide for themselves and their families due to the pandemic.

Sincerely,

Vicky Byrd, MSN, RN
vicky@mtnurses.org/cell:406-459-2915