



November 2, 2021

Legislative Finance Committee members:

MNA thanks you for your service on this important administrative committee. We are offering public comment related to your update from Director Osmundson on HB 632 ARPA spending.

Through the entirety of the covid pandemic, MNA has advocated for and continues to advocate for investment in Montana RNs and healthcare workers. Please see the attached correspondence sent to Director Meier, Governor Gianforte's health policy advisor, Charlie Brereton, and the ARPA Commission on 9/7/2021. As of this correspondence, we have received no communication from neither Director Meier nor the Gianforte administration on this matter. While we were pleased to see [Public Health Workforce Supplemental Funding directed toward DPHHS](#), we are frustrated that nurse retention bonuses and other innovative measures have not been advanced for Montana RNs working in public health.

Here is a direct quote from a Yellowstone County Nurse October 13, 2021... *"If I could tell the Governor one important message about covid I would say that hospitals need to be funded to provide staff with crisis pay. I think all staff should be compensated for working in the conditions we have worked in. But I really think that nursing staff that have directly been working with covid patient[s] this entire time should be financially given hazard pay. We have stepped up and done a lot of work for these patients. Especially when other people in the hospital refuse to go into the rooms of a covid patient. Who else is there to do it? The nurse. Anything that isn't done by someone else has to be done by the nurse. Working with covid patients is difficult, but working with covid patients and not feeling supported makes it even harder. Please compensate your nursing staff that are still working as regular floor staff. It is so incredibly frustrating to come to work and know that travel nurses are making twice the amount I make as a staff nurse and I have been the one there this entire time."*

We are losing Montanans every day to covid. To see this administration using ARPA funds to invest in out of state nurses and healthcare workers with measures like the recently announced Health Care Workforce Relocation Assistance Program is a gut punch to the existing nurses and healthcare workers on the ground, especially in public health. These funds can be used as hazard pay or bonuses, which is allowable. Invest in your Montana workers, invest in your Montana nurses and healthcare workers. Our healthcare system is beyond capacity and nurses are desperate for relief with NONE in sight. Invest in our nursing workforce and retain the nurses we have and recruit Montana nurses back into the workforce.

MNA urges the Legislative Finance Committee and members of the ARPA commission to invest ARPA funds into the nurses and the healthcare workforce that already exists in Montana. Invest in Montanans, don't leave them behind!

Sincerely,

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