

Cooper Proposes \$5.7 Billion COVID 19 COVID Recovery Plan

By Administrator

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Governor Roy Cooper shared his recommendations for how North Carolina can most effectively invest in its recovery through the American Rescue Plan (ARP). The \$5.7 billion in federal funds offer a once-in-a-generation opportunity to invest in North Carolina and ensure a shared recovery from the global pandemic. The Governor's recommendations include assisting families most impacted by the pandemic, upgrading our infrastructure, helping more people get a degree or trade after high school, preparing the state's workforce and promoting business development and innovation. "This pandemic brought us a once-in-a-generation challenge. And these funds have brought us a once-in-a-generation opportunity," said Governor Cooper. "North Carolina's funding from the American Rescue Plan positions our state for a shared recovery and allows us to create a North Carolina that works for all."

Closing the Digital Divide

The recommendation invests \$1.2 billion in broadband access and affordability to close the digital divide in North Carolina. While North Carolina's economy recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic, the gap between residents enjoying economic growth and those struggling to secure jobs, find housing, and pursue educational resources is widening. The funds will provide access to affordable, high-speed internet in every corner of the state and will ensure high-speed internet is equitably adopted and residents are able to access education, healthcare, and business opportunities.

Expanding Access to Affordable Education: NC Guarantee Scholarships and Other Financial Aid

Governor Cooper recommends investing \$350 million in the NC Guarantee Scholarship. The scholarship promises that students from families making \$60,000 a year or less will be guaranteed at least \$6,000 per year to cover the cost of attending any UNC institution or NC community college or receive a smaller award to attend a private college. In conjunction with aid targeted at the neediest students and flexible funding to support degree acceleration through summer school and cover unexpected financial emergencies, this proposal makes significant strides in making college more affordable and accessible to North Carolinians.

Water and Wastewater Infrastructure Investments to Help Communities Grow and Thrive

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The recommendation invests \$800 million to support clean drinking water and reduce water pollution by fixing North Carolina's water and wastewater systems. More than a hundred communities in the state have aging water systems they can't afford to fix, many of which are getting some funds directly from the federal government. North Carolina has a plan to match state and local American Rescue Plan funds to rebuild these systems in a smart, regional way so families can have clean water and these small communities can attract more economic growth. In the recommendations outlined, \$440 million is reserved for water, sewer, and stormwater projects for distressed and at-risk water and wastewater units and \$360 million is available for all units statewide.

Reconnect the Workforce

The Governor's recommendation invests \$25 million to support people who are disconnected from the workforce and increase their access to education, training, and support needed to obtain quality employment. The state will use the funds for initiatives such as work-based learning, rural youth mentorship, and programs to target underrepresented populations. Funds will also support a reentry program partnership with the Department of Public Safety and a program aiding veterans and their families.

The Governor's recommendation also invests \$575 million to address North Carolina's housing needs exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, with an emphasis on increasing housing affordability and availability. This includes down payment assistance to first time homebuyers, including enhanced assistance for eligible public-school teachers.

Hospitality Industry Business Assistance and Recovery Grants

The Governor's recommendation invests \$350 million to promote economic recovery in the hardest-hit industries across the state through two programs that target restaurants and other food services, accommodations such as hotels, recreation and leisure, and personal services businesses. These funds will accelerate economic recovery in communities across the state by helping small businesses.

Sound Basic Public Education

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In order to meet North Carolina's constitutional obligation to provide a sound, basic education for all students, Governor Cooper recommends investing \$300 million to build the educator pipeline, expand NC Pre-K, support high-quality child care, and promote early literacy development. The funds will develop a skilled educator pipeline and build educator capacity, support Science of Reading literacy coaches, and build a strong foundation for North Carolina's children age birth to five by expanding NC Pre-K and investing in home-based early childhood literacy interventions.

Extra Credit Grants 2.0

The recommendation invests \$250 million in grants to low- and middle-income families with children to help alleviate widespread financial hardship across the state. The state will distribute grants of \$250 or \$500 to eligible families, with lower-income families eligible for the higher amount. Many North Carolina families, especially families with children, continue to struggle to afford basic household expenses as the economic fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic persists.