April 22, 2022

Mayor Ruthanne Fuller
Newton City Hall
1000 Commonwealth Avenue
Newton, MA 02459

Dear Mayor Fuller,

Members of the League of Women Voters of Newton (LWVN) Board of Directors have read the *Community Needs Assessment Report* prepared by CGR. It is our understanding that you commissioned the report to assess the needs of the low-income and traditionally marginalized Newton residents to assist you in your allocation of ARPA Funds.

The report highlighted information garnered from a diverse group of respondents to a community-wide survey and targeted focus groups and sets forth recommendations to address the most challenging needs facing Newton households. The two top broad challenges across all groups were housing and financial hardship.

We write to join [U-CHAN](#) in making recommendations to address the top two challenges.

**HOUSING SITE ACQUISITION**

To meet the housing needs of residents most impacted by COVID, Newton will need to facilitate the creation and preservation of deed-restricted housing for individuals and families with incomes at or below 30% of the area median income (AMI). We are joining U-CHAN in recommending that the mayor set-aside $10 million dollars in ARPA funds as a grant to non-profit developers to purchase site(s) and/or building(s) that have the potential to provide no less than 12 units of housing. Most of these units should be for families with annual incomes below 30% of AMI.

**HOUSING STABILIZATION**

Housing stability is one of the stated goals of ARPA, which rent money alone cannot assure. The LWVN board also recommends that the mayor allocate a multi-year grant of $1,000,000 to a Newton-community-based organization with a goal to create a program to deliver comprehensive services to individual households facing instability. The organization would be given a certain amount of funds to provide “direct unrestricted financial support” to those households—identified as the top, most helpful form of assistance in the *Community Needs Assessment Report*.
• There are numerous households in Newton who have received Newton’s Emergency Rental Assistance yet are still in jeopardy of eviction because they have outstanding rent and other financial obligations. These families are in danger of losing their homes once local and state funding is gone.

• Accessing housing assistance in Newton is complex due to the varied requirements of multiple programs involved. Therefore, we join U-CHAN in proposing funding, to the selected Newton-based organization, for the establishment of a program which would supplement the current city and non-profit agencies aiding residents who continue to be threatened with loss of housing or utilities and lack the knowledge to seek assistance. The program would have:

1. Access to personnel who have experience in the Newton community and with state and federal programs
2. Access to personnel who have experience mentoring and coaching low-income households, especially single mothers, using the EMPathways model to help families attain self-sufficiency
3. Access to personnel who have skills and experience in behavioral health with BIPOC populations, especially children
4. The flexibility to award financial assistance when there are no local, state, or federal programs to meet the need
5. The ability to facilitate the identification of at-risk households by collaborating with existing human service and city staff to contact those who received partial financial assistance for outstanding rent and utilities
6. A physical office in Newton and be open at least one night a week and one Saturday or Sunday a month.

These recommendations are aligned with the League of Women Voters’ national, state, and local positions supporting policies as listed below:

• Meeting basic human needs by supporting programs and policies to prevent or reduce poverty and to promote self-sufficiency for individuals and families.

• Affordable Housing by ensuring that individuals and families have access to decent housing and a suitable living environment affordable for all. The League supports programs, policies, and regulations to address the housing needs of low- and moderate-income families and individuals

In addition, the LWV, at all levels, has a priority to address racial inequality within the League, itself, and our communities. For these reasons we reiterate our support of the U-CHAN recommendations.

Sincerely,

Marcia Johnson

Marcia Johnson
President, League of Women Voters, Newton