

*City of Taunton
Office of the Mayor*



For Immediate Press Release: 10/02/2021

Contact: Radka Barter
508-821-1000

**O'Connell Announces ARPA Grant to Local Youth Organizations;
Boys & Girls Club, Taunton YMCA and Girls, Inc. Gratefully Accept
Support of Afterschool Programs**

Taunton, MA... Today Mayor O'Connell announced the City of Taunton is utilizing American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds to sponsor mental health initiatives for Taunton youth. A grant of \$166,000 was awarded to the Boys and Girls Club Metro South, Taunton YMCA and Girls Inc. to fund onsite social workers who will provide mental health services to children in the afterschool programs.

"The wellbeing of our kids is always a top priority. They've been through a lot over the past year and a half. COVID has taken its toll socially, emotionally, and academically. I'm committed to using ARPA funds to ensure children receive the support they need. I am grateful to the many wonderful organizations in Taunton that care for our children and I am thrilled to be able to partner with the Boys and Girls Club, Taunton YMCA, and Girls Inc. to address some of the mental health challenges faced by our Taunton youth," O'Connell said.

The American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 is a \$1.9 trillion economic stimulus bill designed to help local governments mitigate the negative impact of COVID-19 in their communities. The City of Taunton has been allotted a total of \$20,952,932 in federal funding as part of ARPA, although only one-half of that amount is immediately available. This funding comes with strict spending and reporting guidelines.

"We are incredibly grateful to Mayor O'Connell for her support of our innovative collaboration to bring mental health clinicians to three critical youth-serving organizations providing care to Taunton youth," said Derek Heim, President & CEO at Boys & Girls Clubs of Metro South.

"The truth is, for years prior to the COVID-19 pandemic Boys & Girls Clubs of Metro South and our two partner agencies in the city of Taunton have desperately needed to access the skillsets and expertise of licensed social workers to ensure we're meeting the developmental and mental health needs of the children we serve every day after school. The utilization of ARPA funds in such a creative and collaborative way is a true testament to Mayor O'Connell's leadership and commitment to investing in Taunton's youth and promoting partnership across the city. Boys & Girls Clubs of Metro South is proud to lead this collaborative effort with the YMCA and Girls, Inc. and we believe this is just the tip of the iceberg in terms of the benefits that a partnership mindset can bring for all of our kids."

During the pandemic, O'Connell witnessed a rising need for access to mental health resources and launched a Make It OK campaign earlier this year which focused time and resources on addressing mental health issues in the Taunton community. "Mayor O'Connell's Make It Ok Campaign is a game-changer for Taunton," said Roman Davis, Senior Executive Director of the Taunton YMCA. "This funding is about much more than mental health. It's about investing in the city's young people and providing them with resources they need to thrive."

Several local organizations are pleased by the focus on improved mental health in our youth as the impact of COVID-19 has been a critical factor in childhood development in the past year. Jessica Johnstone Darling, Executive Director of Girls, Inc. of Taunton, notes, "Social emotional learning opportunities and mental and behavioral health services are critical to our work to empower girls and offset the negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. This funding will help all of our staff better respond to the changing needs of our girls with a trauma-informed approach. We are grateful for the Mayor's support and voice in recognizing the important role after-school programs play in the development of youth."

Equally important is the acknowledgement from young people that there is a need to be filled. Samara, age 10, a participant in the program at Girls, Inc., expressed her belief in the importance of having a social worker available onsite in the after school programs, "I think this is awesome because when something bad happens in your day, you need someone to talk to who will understand how you feel. You need someone who always has time to pay attention to you when you need it the most. I think it's especially important for us in middle school. There is a lot of drama there."

O'Connell recently hosted a Community Engagement meeting to provide Taunton residents, businesses and organizations the opportunity to offer feedback on how the City of Taunton should prioritize its ARPA funding. Residents can also fill out an online survey on the City of Taunton website or submit input to COVID19INFO@taunton-ma.gov.

For more information regarding the City's ARPA funds, please refer to the homepage of the City of Taunton website at taunton-ma.gov.

###