**Association of Women’s Business Centers March 2021 Advocacy Update**

**Washington, DC, March 9, 2020 -** AWBC celebrated the staff and the work of the 135 Women’s Business Centers (WBC) by standing with all women across the world on International Women’s Day yesterday. AWBC continues to advocate for the Women’s Business Center network so that a growing number of women can forge their own paths through the journey of entrepreneurship.

**Over the weekend, the Senate passed its version of the $1.9 trillion** [**American Rescue Plan (ARP)**](https://awbc.org/arp-senate-passed/)**. The House of Representatives will vote today (Tuesday) on the Senate-passed version of the bill. Following this vote, the bill will be sent to President Biden’s desk for his signature early next week.**

**Especially relevant to the WBC community, the package implements a $100,000,000 community navigator program available until September 30, where WBCs are listed as a resource partner. Managed by the SBA, this program will make grants, contracts, or cooperative agreements with select groups to provide free community navigator services to small businesses concerns, especially for those owned and controlled by women, veterans, socially and economically disadvantaged communities.**

**In conjunction with the program, the SBA Administrator will establish a telephone hotline about Federal programs to assist small businesses and offer referral services, conduct outreach and education on community navigator services and other Federal programs, improve the Administration website accordingly, and establish an earned media campaign for this program. At least $75,000,000 has been designated for this program until September 30, 2022. The Administrator’s authority to make grants lasts until December 31, 2025.**

**AWBC will continue to work with the SBA to fully understand WBC’s roles as resource partners within the community navigator program and will update the WBC network accordingly.**

Notable revisions to the package include removal of the minimum wage provision, modifying COVID-19 unemployment insurance benefits, and tightening eligibility for nonprofits to benefit from forgivable loans under the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP). The package includes several small business provisions such as:

* **$25 billion** in pandemic assistance for the Restaurant Relief program
* **$7.25 billion** in additional PPP assistance
* **$15 billion** for the Targeted Economic Injury Disaster Loan (EIDL) Advance program
* **$1.25 billion** for the Shuttered Venue Operators Grant Program
* **$10 billion** in new funding for the reauthorized State Small Business Credit Initiative

**Looking ahead, AWBC is engaged in the appropriations process for 2022 to advocate for additional program funding and reauthorization to enable WBCs to provide continued training, counseling and additional support for women entrepreneurs nationwide.**