

*City of Taunton
Office of the Mayor*



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Contact: Radka Barter
508-821-1000

**City of Taunton Utilizes ARPA Funds for Youth Programs;
O’Connell Thanks Community Partners for Summer Initiatives**

Taunton, MA... Today Mayor O’Connell announced the City of Taunton is utilizing American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds to address the negative impact of COVID-19 by sponsoring youth programs, such as the Taunton Sport and Wellness Academy.

The American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 is a \$1.9 trillion economic stimulus bill. ARPA was created to help states, municipalities, counties, tribes and territories mitigate the negative impact of COVID-19. “One of the first priorities we discussed in relation to ARPA funds is how to benefit our youth. ARPA funding has been an invaluable asset in creating programs designed to improve the mental, physical and emotional wellbeing of our children. I am grateful to Jay Paulo for the work he has done in putting together the Taunton Sport and Wellness Academy and bringing together members of our community to support and promote healthy activities,” O’Connell said.

Jay Paulo, Retired Mass State Police and member of the Mayor’s UNITE task force, along with Coach Chris Green of Taunton, organized the Taunton Sport and Wellness Academy, a neighborhood basketball instruction program for Taunton children ages 8-14 which ran during the months of July and August. Offered free of charge to participants, the program was held at Paul Bunker Drive, Hopewell Park and Mulcahey School. Paulo gives credit to Taunton for providing multiple opportunities for children this summer. “Fortunately, there were plenty of summer programs offered by a number of organizations and groups for the children. We wanted to complement them with activities that will support their programs as well as offer alternative activities,” Paulo said.

The Taunton Sport and Wellness Academy’s curriculum was designed by Coach Chris Green and Taunton High School Coach Amy Siggins. Basketball players from Taunton High School assisted in running the program. Jay Paulo is proud of the success of the summer program, and envisions it as one step in a much larger plan. “Our goal is to foster healthy relationships and a cohesive community through recreation and healthy activities. We are currently working with Taunton School Dept. and Park & Rec officials to formulate a plan to better utilize existing facilities and to improve, upgrade and reestablish our neighborhood playgrounds to benefit all our citizens. Our commitment is to help improve our community.”

Mayor O'Connell praises involved residents like Jay Paulo and all of the community partners who are putting in substantial time and effort to positively impact the Taunton community. ARPA grants have been awarded to other children's programs including the Taunton TOGETHER Youth Program and the Boys and Girls Club. These programs seek to provide free or low-cost opportunities to local children who may otherwise be excluded from participation due to lack of access or lack of financial resources.

The City of Taunton is slated to receive a total of \$20,952,932 in federal funding as part of the American Rescue Plan Act. ARPA funding comes with strict spending and reporting guidelines. The federal government has set forth guidelines for eligible uses of funding, including responding to acute pandemic-response needs, filling revenue shortfalls, and supporting the communities and populations hardest-hit by COVID-19.

O'Connell is hosting a Community Engagement meeting on September 22, 2021 to provide organizations, businesses, and residents the opportunity to offer feedback on how the City of Taunton should prioritize its ARPA funding. "We have a unique opportunity to use these ARPA funds to move Taunton forward after a challenging year. It has been gratifying to provide our children with the support they need and deserve. I am hopeful that we will make appreciable progress mitigating some of the negative impact of COVID-19 using our ARPA funds," said O'Connell.

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