

*City of Taunton
Office of the Mayor*



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**O'Connell Announces Mental Health Grant Renewal
To Local Youth Organizations**

Taunton, MA...Today Mayor Shaunna O'Connell announced the City of Taunton is renewing an American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) grant to continue to advance mental health initiatives for Taunton youth. A grant of \$175,000 was awarded to the Boys and Girls Club Metro South, Old Colony YMCA and Girls Inc. to continue to fund onsite social workers who provide mental health services to children in the afterschool programs.

"Last year we met with the Boys & Girls Club, YMCA, and Girls Inc. to ask how we could best support our kids in the aftermath of the pandemic, and the Taunton Youth Mental Health Collaborative initiative was created. The positive impact of the program on our kids and families has been extraordinary, and we are thrilled to continue funding this important program," said O'Connell.

The American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 is a \$1.9 trillion economic stimulus bill designed to help local governments mitigate the negative impacts of COVID-19 in their communities. ARPA funding comes with strict spending and reporting guidelines. The City of Taunton has carefully apportioned ARPA funds to meet critical needs in the City including infrastructure upgrades, mental health initiatives, and personnel support.

Mental health initiatives have been a priority for Mayor O'Connell's administration, particularly so following the pandemic. Local youth organizations are grateful for the Mayor's continuing advocacy. "We're profoundly grateful for Mayor O'Connell's continued support of our Taunton Youth Mental Health Collaborative initiative which the City's ARPA funds helped to make possible over the past school year," said Monica Lombardo, Vice President & Chief Advancement Officer at Boys & Girls Clubs of Metro South. "The positive outcomes observed in the first year of this initiative for all three organizations have been nothing short of incredible. As a result of this funding, nearly 400 youth served by our organizations have received one-on-one and small group counseling, behavioral support, and access to mental health resources. As a result, we have seen a dramatic improvement in the effectiveness of our programs for these youth. We're very excited to build off of this progress in year two of our partnership."

The collaborative relationship between the three youth organizations has served to provide consistency in the support provided across programs. Jessica Johnstone-Darling, Executive Director of Girls, Inc., has seen firsthand the benefits of the mental health support provided by

O'Connell's administration. "Being awarded the ARPA grant for a second year helps Girls Inc. best support our members as we continue to face the emerging challenges of the post-pandemic world. This funding allows for Girls Inc. to continue to grow the social, emotional and mental health supports and services offered to our members and increase training opportunities for our staff. We are also able to strengthen the partnerships between the three organizations and offer better care, supports and services for all youth in our City.

Similar sentiments are expressed by Roman Davis, Senior Executive Director of the Taunton YMCA, "We are so grateful that Mayor O'Connell and the City of Taunton continue to invest in mental health programming for local children and families. These resources will allow our Y to better serve the community."

The investment in Taunton youth has had an immediate and appreciable impact. Positive feedback has been offered by the children who have benefitted from support provided by the social workers. "The pandemic was stressful. I had trouble learning online and I felt drained and sad from not being able to see family, friends and teachers. Miss Emily has helped me and other girls at Girls Inc. by giving us a space to just let go of everything and talk about whatever comes to mind. Having her here makes me feel safe and comfortable again," said Amiyah Hasan, age 10, participant at Girls, Inc.

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