

Erin Noonan's Email Response to *Marblehead Beacon*

I have concerns about both the lack of urgency in distributing the ARPA funds and confusion about the process. The two biggest impacts from Covid-19 have been in the areas of learning loss and mental health. Marblehead has received about \$6 million in federal relief funds with broad discretion on how to allocate them. Last Winter, the School Department made a modest request for \$20,000 to run a summer learning academy and \$75,000 for an after-school program. We are into the second quarter this school year and there was no summer school or afterschool program because the funds were not released. It was not until last month that the request came before the Select Board and the money was voted to go to the School Department. Now they will be tasked with trying to secure tutors and personnel mid-year to organize a program before the end of the school year.

Additionally, the Marblehead Counseling Center also applied for ARPA funds a year ago and updated their request in August. It was not until mid-October that a request for \$200,000 from the Board of Health for "mental health treatment, resources and support" came before the Select Board for a vote. It is now up to the Marblehead Counseling Center to petition the Board of Health for ARPA funds, despite the fact that it already applied directly to the Town on two occasions. Hopefully the Board of Health will meet and vote on an amount of funds directly to the MCC ASAP. Only once it receives these needed funds can it utilize them to advertise and hire additional therapists. I regret that the Select Board has created further delay and a proverbial hoop for the counseling center to jump through. It is also still unclear to me what specific uses the Health Department has for the \$200,000 that it requested. It appears to me that an amount was requested without any clear plan or budget on what services or programs it would provide with that amount of money.

As we approach the three year anniversary of the pandemic, I would like to see some sense of urgency from the ARPA Working Group on getting these funds to those most affected. There are a number of projects also prioritized that will only get more expensive the longer the Town waits to initiate them. I can appreciate the decision to hold back some funds as things emerge between now and next year and certain projects possibly able to be grant funded. There is \$6 million however and real needs in the community that have only continued to grow while the funds sit in the bank.