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Passing a Law is the Beginning, Not the End, of Advocacy

What's a great law that's not implemented? A waste of time.

Follow-through isn't just important; it's essential if the time and effort dedicated to passing the law are to be redeemed. Here are two examples, both related to the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) enacted by Congress in March 2021.

As the result of intense lobbying by charitable nonprofits, Congress expressly stated that State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds could be distributed to charitable nonprofits, making organizations in every community eligible for relief and increased spending. However, the initial regulations ([interim final rule](#)) from the U.S. Department of Treasury in May 2021 barely mentioned nonprofits, leading several state and local governments to think they could not dedicate any of their share of the \$350 billion in ARPA funds to support local nonprofits.

Nonprofits then launched an aggressive campaign of public comments to Treasury to improve the regulations.

And it worked. In January 2022, Treasury issued its [Final Rule for the State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds](#) program that specifically clarifies that state, local, and Tribal governments may use devote their ARPA funds to support charitable organizations.

That improvement leads to the next example.



In July 2022, the **Michigan** legislature appropriated from the state's ARPA fund \$50 million to create a dedicated relief program to grant funds to charitable nonprofits. The funds are being routed through the state's Department of Labor and Economic Opportunity (LEO). Importantly, the **Michigan Nonprofit Association**, which led the advocacy efforts to get the program created, is now working with the Department to design a program that aligns with shared priorities.

As a result of this collaboration, two advisory groups have been established to ensure nonprofit input in how the funds are spent.

- Statewide Advisory Committee will provide insight in development of the community-centered/participatory grantmaking process, including the application and rubric for scoring applications.
- Regional Advisory Boards will provide local outreach, training, and technical assistance for nonprofits, reviewing applications, and making recommendations for awards.

All of this is still a work in progress, which is positive news. The Michigan Nonprofit Association is working to ensure funding is made available to assist the two groups. The state association of nonprofits will also be sending out informational materials that explain the basic requirements to qualify and ask a series of questions to get a sense of the demand in the field.

While the people in charitable nonprofits usually are best qualified to advise on what should go into legislation affecting their organizations, those people are even better qualified at determining how ideas can and should be implemented in the real world.

But they can leverage their expertise for the community only if they share their views. Or, stated another way, passing a law is only the beginning, not the end, of advocacy to advance nonprofit missions.