

Federal Policy Updates: The Debrief

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At the federal level, there have been some quick, significant policy changes – namely the passing of the most recent COVID-19 relief bill; changes in the public charge; and movement on the Equality Act.

American Rescue Plan Act

The most recent COVID-19 relief bill, the American Rescue Plan Act, was passed by Congress and signed into law by President Biden on March 11, 2021. This package responds to some of the concerns around the ongoing public health and economic needs of communities across the country. The \$1.9 trillion act includes expansions in health coverage; increased housing assistance; expanded and extended unemployment benefits; fiscal aid for states, territories, tribes, and localities; and, an additional round of \$1,400 stimulus payments. More details about the American Rescue Plan Act can be found [here](#).

Public Charge

The transition in administration has also come with changes in the public charge law. Last month, President Biden issued an executive order directing the Department of Homeland Security and the State Department to reconsider the public charge regulations and other rules that harm immigrant communities. Subsequently, the United States Department of Justice filed motions to dismiss its defense of the Trump Era public charge rule, ending the two-year legal battle to invalidate the rule nationwide. More information about the change is available [here](#), and a statement from advocates that pushed for this change is available [here](#).

Equality Act

Finally, last month, the Equality Act has passed the House of Representatives and was heard in the Senate Judiciary Committee this morning. The Equality Act seeks to provide protections for LGBTQ+ individuals and would amend the Civil Rights Act and other civil rights legislation to achieve that goal. AIDS Foundation Chicago (AFC) supports the Equality Act and continues to advocate for policies that will further protect all people from discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity. [Read our letter in support of the Equality Act here.](#)