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Memorandum

To: Steve Klein, Chief Fiscal Officer, Legislative Joint Fiscal Office
From: Tom Kavet
CC: House Committee on Commerce and Economic Development
Date: August 26, 2020
Re: Economic Priorities: CARES Act Allocation Inquiry

Per your request, I am writing in response to two inquiries from the House Committee on Commerce and Economic Development regarding the optimal use of remaining CARES Act funding. Although the time allotted for analytic work on this issue is nowhere close to adequate given the complexity and magnitude of the expenditures involved, I will offer a few general observations and if further inquiry is desired, am available to perform a more rigorous review with specific program recommendations and costs, if legislative timing permits.

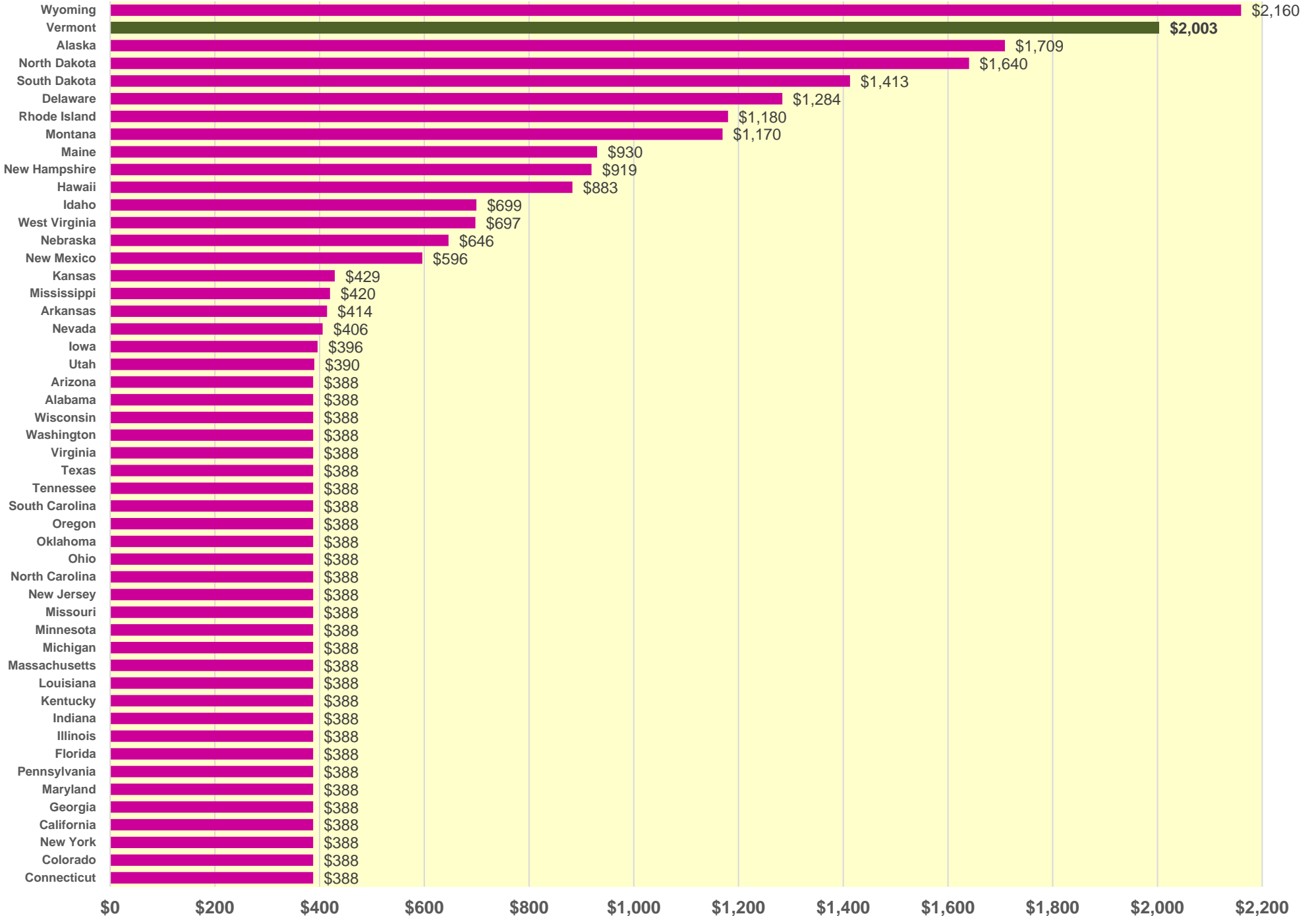
The CARES Act comes with a stringent and ever-changing set of limitations, including a year-end cutoff date, for use of the vast federal funding provided to Vermont. As noted previously, and in the graphs on the following two pages, Vermont has received more per capita federal COVID-related funding than most other states. CARES Act restrictions impinge upon the use of the funds for maximum beneficial State economic impact, however, almost all contemplated uses will have significant positive economic effects.

In general, the criteria for optimal disbursements of the remaining CARES Act funds include both economic and equity considerations. Ideally, resources should be targeted to those most in need and, first and foremost, insure provision of essential needs such as food, housing and medical care for all. In the interest of getting funding out quickly, and with inadequate extant institutional mechanisms to do so, prior federal COVID disbursements were not well-targeted. This resulted in not only waste, but shortfalls in areas of real need and windfalls elsewhere that have fueled a boom in new car and truck sales, housing and stock prices. Reflecting this, personal saving rates did not rise for those most in need, but the aggregate national rate soared from 12.6% in March to 32.2% in April and to 23.2% in May.

Targeted essential needs funding includes things such as: Food banks, emergency shelters, rental assistance, mortgage assistance, property tax assistance, and transfer payments to the 30,000 Vermonters who have lost their jobs and are still unemployed, including supplemental and extended unemployment insurance benefits. Although some of these have been funded in whole or part previously, these needs should come first and have sufficient capacity to withstand a second wave of the pandemic if possible, when CARES Act funding or a successor program may not be available. For example, food banks can expand

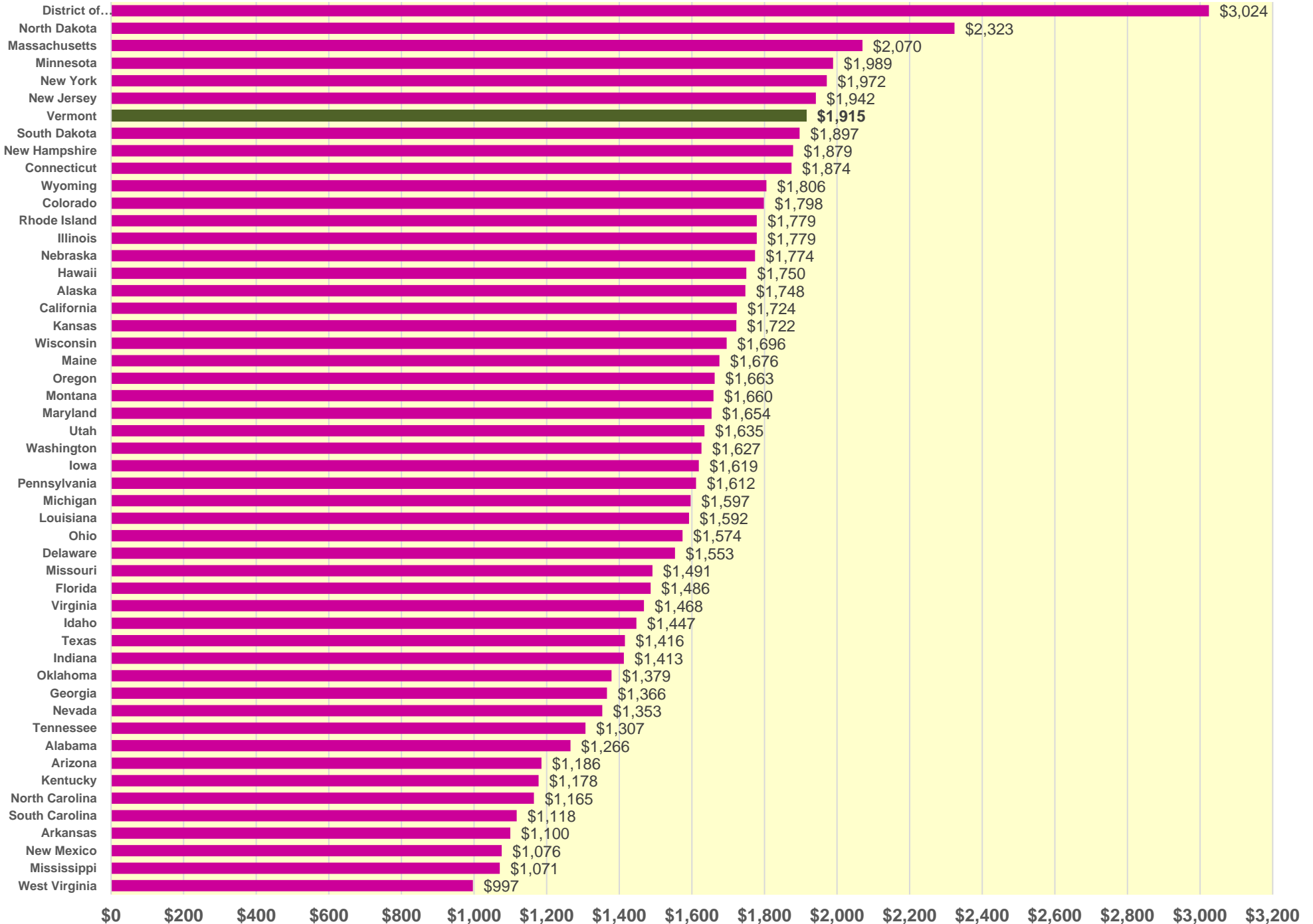
New York x 5 = Vermont: Per Capita CARES Act Funding

Source: U.S. Department of the Treasury



West Virginia x 2 = Vermont: Per Capita PPP Funding

Source: U.S. Department of the Treasury



stocks and delivery systems with current funding increases, thereby providing surge capacity to handle future potential needs.

The second highest areas of beneficial potential economic impact are investments that encourage and support both current economic activity and future economic development. This includes maximum upgrading and extension of broadband services and funding for safe childcare and K-12 reopening measures. It was not clear before the pandemic, the importance of reliable high speed broadband access is obvious now. It has enabled economic activity during the pandemic where present and stunted it where not. It has enabled a wave of second home owners to work from (and pay taxes in) Vermont and attracted a growing number of permanent residents far in excess of anything the paltry incentive to move programs could possibly achieve. Although there have been prior allocations of money for this purpose, no stone should be unturned between now and the end of the year in extending and improving this critical infrastructure throughout the State.

Similarly, safe childcare and K-12 public schools allow parents to return to work and have also been an attraction to new residents. Vermont's exemplary performance in limiting COVID community transmission through widespread social compliance allows the possibility of safe public school attendance in a way not possible in states and regions with higher transmission rates. Funding to enable this will produce immediate economic returns as well as educational benefits to students.

The third area of optimal disbursements would target companies and institutions in critical State economic sectors not previously served or substantially underserved that are not at high risk of permanent loss. The sectors that should be considered for substantial additional support include private higher education institutions, non-profits, and arts, entertainment and community service sector firms, including sole proprietors. The State could also help these sectors to transition to digital platforms via on-line marketplaces for Vermont products and services, including galleries for artists and craftsmen, store-fronts for local food products, and musical performances projected to all through the internet - bringing a kind of "virtual tourism" to products and services normally sold to visitors to the State.

Industry sectors experiencing the greatest employment losses are included in Table 1 on page 5. Not every business that has been hurt by the pandemic, however, will survive – with or without public assistance. Some sectors and stressed businesses confronting a protracted period of diminished business activity will disappear or need to be reconstituted at some future time. Spending on such entities will not accomplish the desired objective and deprive others of funds needed for their survival. This presents difficult funding decisions, but pouring massive additional funding into more permanently stressed sectors is unlikely generate desired outcomes.

For workers in sectors beset by longer term losses and firms that do not survive, job training in fields with higher demand will be essential. Funding for free or heavily discounted vocational and college courses in Vermont would benefit displaced and underemployed workers, the Vermont educational institutions they attend and future economic growth. This should be immediately available, with second semester charges paid in December (as is the norm), and large enough to enable many thousands of unemployed and underemployed workers to participate.

In general, programs that indiscriminately disburse funds or do so with little targeting of need are the least effective. The federal payments of \$1,200 per person, regardless of negative COVID impact and, for the most part, income, are an example of this. While providing stimulus, they usually have lower local economic multipliers and reduce funds available for businesses and individuals in greatest need. The current \$50M ACCD proposal to provide “gift cards” to all Vermonters falls in this category. If there are funds available after funding all of the above more targeted needs and/or unspent funds in December requiring quick use, a better program option would be to provide supplemental retroactive hazard pay to low income essential workers or gift cards to low income residents for limited use in purchasing non-taxable food, medicine and clothing. Either, or both of these, could easily consume \$20M-\$50M in unused funds on short notice if necessary.

Lastly one of the inquiries requested comment on “austerity budgeting vs. deficit spending.” While deficit spending at the federal level is prescriptive in a recession, it is not at the state level. Once rainy day funds and other surpluses are consumed, any revenue shortfall will need to be offset with lower spending, higher taxes, greater borrowing, or some mix of these – all of which have negative economic effects (unless there are spending cuts that represent efficiencies that should have been effected in any event, vast unused borrowing capacity, or comparable unused tax capacity).

Please let me know if you would like further analysis or greater detail regarding any of the above comments and perspectives.

TABLE 1

Vermont Payroll Employment Industry Sector	Percent Change vs. Year Ago (Not Seasonally Adjusted)						
	Jan 2020	Feb 2020	Mar 2020	Apr 2020	May 2020	Jun 2020	Jul 2020
Total Nonfarm	-0.4	-0.4	-2.6	-22.5	-17.4	-13.5	-11.8
Mining and Logging	0.0	0.0	-12.5	-25.0	0.0	0.0	-11.1
Construction	-7.3	-6.7	-8.1	-56.6	-34.4	-27.0	-25.9
Manufacturing	-1.4	-1.0	-2.0	-26.4	-10.1	-12.2	-12.1
Trade, Transportation, and Utilities	-1.7	-0.9	-2.8	-20.9	-13.1	-8.1	-5.9
Information	0.0	0.0	0.0	-4.8	-7.0	-7.0	-4.7
Financial Activities	-5.7	-2.5	-3.3	-8.3	-8.9	-8.9	-8.7
Professional and Business Services	1.4	1.1	-0.7	-14.7	-9.6	-9.0	-7.2
Education and Health Services	-0.2	-1.0	-4.0	-14.0	-12.5	-6.2	-5.2
Leisure and Hospitality	1.3	0.5	-6.4	-66.5	-59.5	-49.1	-43.7
Other Services	-1.0	-1.0	-2.0	-19.6	-19.4	-11.4	-11.4
Government	2.0	1.9	2.1	-5.5	-7.6	-4.5	-1.2

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, July data are preliminary

U.S. PPP Disbursements by NAICS Sector

NAICS Sector Description	Loan Count	Net Dollars	% of Amount
Health Care and Social Assistance	522,900	\$67,308,168,304	12.91%
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	664,941	\$66,431,416,001	12.74%
Construction	484,806	\$64,697,933,772	12.41%
Manufacturing	234,948	\$53,922,171,696	10.34%
Accommodation and Food Services	377,460	\$42,226,563,861	8.10%
Retail Trade	463,764	\$40,378,607,813	7.74%
Other Services (except Public Administration)	563,154	\$31,286,196,747	6.00%
Wholesale Trade	171,553	\$27,508,783,153	5.28%
Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services	251,285	\$26,381,319,807	5.06%
Transportation and Warehousing	215,982	\$17,241,704,592	3.31%
Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	256,412	\$15,605,067,970	2.99%
Finance and Insurance	175,760	\$12,088,513,425	2.32%
Educational Services	85,426	\$11,982,020,521	2.30%
Unclassified Establishments	219,582	\$9,655,072,807	1.85%
Information	72,057	\$9,279,228,782	1.78%
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	125,777	\$8,089,594,232	1.55%
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting	144,334	\$7,994,868,458	1.53%
Mining	22,156	\$4,521,098,771	0.87%
Public Administration	13,956	\$1,748,125,718	0.34%
Management of Companies and Enterprises	9,137	\$1,548,812,402	0.30%
Utilities	8,195	\$1,490,681,774	0.29%

Approvals through 07/31/2020