

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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\*Updated\*

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**Emergency Task Force Calls for Immediate Action to Address Equity in the Face of Epidemic**

BOSTON - This morning, more than 100 leading public health, grassroots, civil rights, medical, labor, and social service organizations will issue a call to action to state leaders to take urgent action to address the impact of the epidemic on low wage workers, immigrants, people at risk of losing their homes, and people experiencing homelessness. The event will be held at 9:00am via Zoom (registration: <https://tinyurl.com/COVID19-Equity-PressConf>).

“This outbreak is not affecting Massachusetts residents equally,” said **Carlene Pavlos, Executive Director of the Massachusetts Public Health Association**. “The impact of this virus is both exposing and worsening deep inequities rooted in racism, poverty, and xenophobia. We need Governor Baker, Attorney General Healey, and the Legislature to take action immediately in the face of this public health emergency.”

The Emergency Task Force on Coronavirus & Equity, convened by the Massachusetts Public Health Association on March 17<sup>th</sup>, is calling on state leaders to immediately act on four urgent policy priorities. Details about the policy proposal are available [here](#). An updated list of endorsing organizations can be viewed [here](#).

1. First, the group is calling on Governor Baker, the Attorney General, and the Legislature to **Ensure Immigrants Have Safe Access to Testing & Treatment**, in part by aggressively communicating that all residents will have access to testing and treatment regardless of immigration status and that medical and social service providers may not share patients’ information with federal immigration enforcement authorities.

*“The Trump Administration has threatened to punish immigrants for accessing benefits and has actively scapegoated Chinese communities during this crisis,” said **Karen Chen, Executive Director of the Chinese Progressive Association**. “In this environment of fear and distrust, we need Governor Baker and other state leaders to assure immigrants that getting tested or getting treatment won’t expose them to harm or legal consequences. This can only be accomplished by partnering with trusted community leaders and media to get this message out.”*

2. Second, the group is calling on Governor Baker and the Legislature to **Ensure Everyone Has Access to Safe Quarantine**, by directing emergency management agencies to immediately identify alternative sites for safe, dignified quarantine for people experiencing homelessness and others without such access.

*“Our member agencies serve thousands of individuals experiencing homelessness every day across Massachusetts. They are at capacity and simply don’t have the facilities or money to provide for recommended physical distancing, much less safe quarantine for those who need it,” said **Joyce Tavon, Director of Programs & Planning at the Massachusetts Housing & Shelter Alliance**. “We need Governor Baker and our emergency management agencies to ensure everyone living in a congregate facility has access to a safe, dignified place for quarantine.”*

3. Third, the group is calling on the Legislature to **Pass Emergency Paid Sick Time** to ensure the economic security of residents forced to stay home due to quarantine, infection, or the need to care for loved ones.

*“COVID-19 is not only a major health threat — it is becoming an economic catastrophe for working people,” said **Pablo Ruiz, Deputy Director of the SEIU State Council & Co-Chair of the Raise Up Massachusetts Grassroots Committee**. “Healthcare and long-term care workers, janitorial workers, food service workers, child care workers,*

*municipal workers, adjunct faculty, gig workers, and others on the front lines are critical to supporting our communities during the outbreak. But many of them are struggling economically and lack basic economic protections, including adequate paid sick time. It's essential that the legislature act now to guarantee Emergency Paid Sick Time for all workers who are caring for infected family members or children home from school, or who need to self-quarantine because they've been exposed to the virus."*

4. Fourth, the group is calling on the Legislature to **Enact a Moratorium on Evictions, Foreclosures & Termination of Public Benefits**, recognizing that without a safe place to call home or access to the basic necessities of life, residents will face far greater risk of infection, overall poorer health, and spiraling economic insecurity.

*"We fight alongside people every day struggling to stay in their homes, so we know that eviction and foreclosure are devastating events during normal times," said **Lisa Owens, Executive Director of City Life/Vida Urbana**. "The legislature must act now to stop all evictions and foreclosures during this emergency to protect residents with few resources or a safety net and to prevent the escalation of the pandemic."*

The Task Force Co-Chairs are **Sandro Galea**, Dean of the Boston University School of Public Health, and **Cheryl Bartlett**, CEO of the Greater New Bedford Community Health Center.

*"As the CEO of a Community Health Center, we are watching as our patients experience, in real time, the impact of the public health measures that are being taken to control the spread of COVID-19," said **Cheryl Bartlett, CEO of the Greater New Bedford Community Health Center and Co-Chair of the Task Force**. "The Task Force's urgent policy recommendations are important steps that we need right now to provide support for our patients and our community."*

*"COVID-19 provides a painful reminder of why inequities harm all of us," said **Sandro Galea, Dean of the Boston University School of Public Health and Co-Chair of the Task Force**. "These inequities, created and sustained by centuries of structural racism and other forms of structural discrimination, make large segments of our society vulnerable to catching and spreading a disease that affects all. We must act with urgency in a concerted effort towards ensuring health equity in a time of true and unique challenge for all of us."*

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