

April 17, 2020

Governor Charlie Baker
Secretary Marylou Sudders
Commonwealth of Massachusetts
State House
Boston, MA 02133

RE: Need for Public Data and Action Plan On Inequities In COVID-19 Impact

Dear Governor Baker and Secretary Sudders:

We are writing as members of the Task Force on Coronavirus & Equity to ask you to continue the state's progress on data collection and reporting to understand the equity impacts of the COVID-19 epidemic in Massachusetts, as well as to implore you to prioritize action to address inequities that are becoming ever more clear.

The Task Force on Coronavirus & Equity was convened exactly one month ago to identify and promote policy solutions to prevent and respond to health and economic inequities in the impact of the outbreak. Though no data was available at that time, we strongly suspected that the outbreak would not impact all Massachusetts residents equally. Rather, we anticipated that communities that are already facing marginalization would be hardest hit by the virus and its economic repercussions, starkly exposing inequities across Massachusetts and the nation driven by racism, poverty, and xenophobia. Unfortunately, emerging data from Massachusetts and the nation bear out this expectation.

It is essential that Massachusetts act with urgency to fully understand these inequities, and more importantly, to take bold action to support those communities that are most impacted and to prevent further widening of these gaps.

We appreciate recent action by the Administration to make more data publicly available, including data on race and ethnicity of confirmed cases and deaths, as well as case counts by municipality. We strongly support these measures as important ways to improve our understanding of the outbreak and inform smart approaches to prevention and response that prioritize communities and populations that are being disproportionately affected.

In addition to the moves already taken, we call on you to take these actions:

- **Provide regular, detailed reports of the Administration's actions and plans to prevent and reduce inequities in the health and economic impact of the outbreak.** While additional data collection and reporting is needed to fully understand the impacts of the virus, we have clear and compelling data demonstrating that there is an inequitable impact across communities and that unacceptable racial inequities exist. Knowing this information is not the goal; action is imperative. We ask that you provide clear, regular, and detailed information to the public about how the Administration is working to prevent and respond to these inequities.
- **Use all tools available to accelerate accurate and complete collection of race and ethnicity data by labs and medical providers.** While race/ethnicity data is now being reported daily by the state, more than 60% of cases and deaths are missing this data, leaving major gaps in our

understanding. The Public Health Order of April 8th clarifies that health care providers should make every effort to collect race and ethnicity. It also states that DPH will issue guidance to those entities ordering and providing tests, yet this guidance has not yet been released. The order was issued 8 days ago, yet the percentage of cases with missing race/ethnicity data has not improved significantly. It is essential that the Administration provide more resources and guidance – and most importantly, urgency – to improve these numbers.

- **Include additional demographic factors in data collection and reporting, so that we can understand the full scope of potential inequities.** Past experience and anecdotal evidence strongly suggest that inequities are present across other demographic factors, including socio-economic status, disability, language, and occupation and industry, among others. Without these data, we are in the dark about the nature of these inequities and therefore limited in our ability to take strategic action.
- **Provide testing numbers by municipality, disaggregated by race/ethnicity and other demographic factors.** Current reporting only provides insights into confirmed cases and deaths. However, we are concerned about equitable access to testing, particularly in communities of color. We ask that you provide the number of tests conducted by municipality of residence, and we ask that you disaggregate these numbers by race/ethnicity, sex, age, socio-economic status, disability, and occupation, at a minimum.
- **Monitor racial inequities in enforcement of public health orders.** It is important that public health officials, with the collaboration of other municipal and state officials, conduct effective educational, outreach, and enforcement measures to ensure the highest level of safety for Massachusetts residents during this crisis. However, given our clear knowledge of inequities in law enforcement actions, we must ensure that communities of color and low-income communities are not targeted by fines, arrests, or other enforcement activities. The Administration should direct municipal and state officials to collect and report data to monitor enforcement activities, and to take corrective action, if needed.

In collecting and releasing these data, it is crucial the state protect fundamental rights and uphold privacy rights by limiting the collection of and protecting personally identifiable information and withholding small numbers.

Thank you for your hard work in the midst of this unprecedented outbreak. We ask for your urgent and attention to these requests, and we stand ready to support your efforts.

Sincerely,

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Charlotte Bruce, **Children's HealthWatch**

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Debra Falzoi, **End Workplace Abuse**

Laura Sylvester, **The Food Bank of Western Massachusetts**

Karen Andrade, **The Greater Boston Food Bank**

Gail Page, **Green Sanctuary, Climate Action Group of Unitarian Universalist Church of Reading**

Heather McMann, **Groundwork Lawrence**

Alex Sheff, **Health Care for All**

Andrew Cohen, **Health Law Advocates**

Jennifer Valenzuela, **Health Leads**

Steven Ridini, **Health Resources in Action**

Sarah Bayer, Elizabeth Peck, **Homes for Families**

Helena DaSilva Hughes, **Immigrants' Assistance Center, Inc. (IAC)**

Enid Eckstein, **Jamaica Plain Progressives**

Mohammed Missouri, **Jetpac**

Cindy Rowe, **Jewish Alliance for Law and Social Action**

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Jamie Berberena and Lissette Blondet, **Massachusetts Association of Community Health Workers**

Michael Hugo, **Massachusetts Association of Health Boards**

Kelly Turley, **Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless**

Jodi Sugerman-Brozan, **Massachusetts Coalition for Occupational Safety and Health**

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