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## **Statewide Task Force Calls on Governor Baker to Fill Gaps in State Data Collection, Develop Clear Action Plan to Address Health Inequities**

BOSTON, MA - Today, the Emergency Task Force on Coronavirus & Equity issued an open letter to Governor Baker and Secretary Sudders, signed by 59 organizations, calling on them to take decisive action to address inequities in the impact of the COVID-19 epidemic on communities of color and other marginalized populations.

“We respect the immense challenges faced by Governor Baker right now,” said **Carlene Pavlos, Executive Director of the Massachusetts Public Health Association**, which coordinates the Task Force. “But his Administration must act with more urgency to understand the equity impacts of the COVID-19 epidemic in Massachusetts and – more importantly – to take bold action to support those communities that are most impacted.”

In the letter, the Task Force praised the Baker Administration’s recent decision to make more data publicly available, including data on the race and ethnicity of confirmed cases and deaths, as well as case counts by municipality. They called on the Administration to continue to improve the quality of data being released, and more importantly, to develop a clear plan for responding to the inequities being revealed.

“There is no longer any pretense that COVID-19 is affecting communities equally,” continued Pavlos. “Poor and marginalized communities – with higher rates of underlying health conditions, more crowded living conditions and greater barriers to accessing care – are being hit the hardest. It’s time for Governor Baker to address this reality.”

The Task Force called on the Administration to address five gaps in the state’s current data collection and action planning efforts:

- 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.
- Use all tools available to accelerate accurate and complete collection of race and ethnicity data by labs and medical providers.
- Include additional demographic factors in data collection and reporting, so that we can understand the full scope of potential inequities.
- Provide testing numbers by municipality, disaggregated by race/ethnicity and other demographic factors.
- Monitor racial inequities in enforcement of public health orders.

The Emergency Task Force on Coronavirus & Equity was formed in mid-March, in an effort to mitigate the devastating effects of the COVID -19 epidemic on low-wage workers, individuals experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity, immigrants, and other marginalized groups. The Task Force is co-chaired by **Sandro Galea, MD, Dean of the Boston University School of Public Health** and **Cheryl Bartlett, RN, CEO of the Greater New Bedford Community Health Center and former Commissioner of the Massachusetts Department of Public Health**.

To date, the Task Force's policy recommendations include:

1. Enacting a Moratorium on Evictions and Foreclosures
2. Passing Emergency Paid Sick Time
3. Ensuring that People Experiencing Homelessness Have Access to Safe Quarantine
4. Ensuring that Immigrants Have Safe Access to Testing & Treatment
5. Releasing People from Incarceration
6. Reporting Data on Equity Impacts of the Outbreak and Using Data to Inform Action Planning

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The Massachusetts Public Health Association (MPHA) is a nonprofit statewide organization focused on eliminating health inequities and creating healthy communities through advocacy, community organizing, and coalition-building.