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Public Health & Community Leaders Demand that Governor Baker Not Allow a Reopening at the Expense of Black and Latinx Communities

Coalition announces four criteria for a reopening that protects all residents

BOSTON – Today, public health and community leaders announced four criteria that must be met before moving to Phase Two of reopening to ensure that low wage workers, communities of color, and other disproportionately-impacted populations are adequately protected. The criteria, backed by a coalition of more than 100 organizations, are:

- Infection Rates Dropping for All
- Enforceable Protections for Workers + Support for Small Businesses
- Testing, Testing, Testing
- A Seat at the Table

The full statement, description of the criteria, and a list of endorsing organizations is available here: <https://tinyurl.com/EquitableReopeningCriteria>.

The announcement came two days before Governor Baker is slated to decide whether to proceed with Phase Two of reopening and amid a national outcry of protest against police brutality and structural racism.

*“Good jobs that provide benefits and a living wage are important contributors to health. We want to see a strong and vibrant economy,” said **Carlene Pavlos, Executive Director of the Massachusetts Public Health Association**. “But we will not accept a reopening that happens at the expense of low wage workers and people of color. Across this state people are demanding change. The administration can and must choose to change its plans for reopening to place equity at the center of those plans. These criteria will provide a framework for such an equitable reopening.”*

*“Although Black people have borne the disproportionate burden of the cases and deaths from COVID-19 in Boston, the problems with the COVID-19 response are not “Black” problems, but problems with our systems, structures, policies, programs, and decision-making processes that impact all of us,” said **Dr. Atyia Martin, member of the Black Boston COVID-19 Coalition**. “The Black Boston COVID-19 Coalition (BBCC) is demanding a return on our investment in the City of Boston and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, and the use of best practices for responding to a pandemic.”*

The coalition’s first criterion – Infection Rates Dropping for All - calls for a sustained reduction in infections over a two-week period for the overall state population and for subpopulations that have borne a disproportionate burden and risk during the outbreak, including Black, Latinx, and

other residents of color; people who work in high-risk occupations, and other groups that have been disproportionately-impacted. The coalition asserted that positive trends for overall state data may very well mask inequities among populations

already experiencing disproportionate risk and marginalization.

*“As co-chair of the Task Force on Coronavirus and Equity, I have been part of our consistent calls for addressing the unequal impact of the COVID-19 epidemic and its economic fall-out,” said **Cheryl Bartlett, CEO of the Greater New Bedford Health Center and former state Commissioner of Public Health.** “Equity must also be built into our reopening and recovery plans. If we cannot identify who is getting sick, through expanded testing and data collection, then how can we be sure that the most marginalized members of our community are not continuing to be disproportionately impacted? We can do better and we must do better.”*

*“We cannot move to phase 2 of reopening until we have adequate data showing infection rates are dropping in the hardest hit communities,” said **Oami Amarasingham, Deputy Legislative Director at the ACLU of Massachusetts.** “Now especially—during nationwide conversations about racial justice—we have to pay attention to racial disparities in health care, and we can’t manage what we don’t measure.”*

The coalition’s second criterion – Enforceable Protections for Workers + Support for Small Businesses – asks the Baker Administration to require worksite-specific hazards assessments and safety plans for businesses that are reopening, support for small businesses to adopt safety standards, and funds to support understaffed local boards of health and the Department of Labor Standards to provide enforcement capacity that protects workers and the public.”

*“Workers are not expendable commodities and must be protected from exposure to the virus which we still have no treatment or vaccine for. Their lives literally depend on it, and so do ours,” said **Al Vega, Director of Policy & Programs at the Massachusetts Coalition for Occupational Safety and Health.** “We believe every worker has a right to go to work, without harm, injury or fear of death and return home safely to their loved ones on a daily basis. We hope this an opportunity for our state to truly take bold and adequate measures to protect primarily black, brown and immigrant workers (both documented and undocumented) in our state who represent a majority of the workforce being asked to return to work as we attempt to reopen more of our state’s businesses during a pandemic.”*

The coalition’s third criterion – Testing, Testing, Testing – demands that the Baker Administration show effective progress toward meeting its own testing goals, noting that the state is just 22% of the way to meeting its testing benchmark for July 31st and made no appreciable progress in expanding testing during the month of May. The coalition further calls on the Governor to lay out a clear plan for how asymptomatic, high-risk individuals can access testing, recognizing that the virus can be spread by people with no symptoms.

*“There are too many flaming hoops to jump through to get tested—you have to already have symptoms, you need a referral from a doctor, and you need—maybe also an appointment and a green card. It should be easy and encouraging to get tested!” said **Helena DaSilva Hughes, Executive Director, Immigrants Assistance Center.** “In New Bedford there are approximately 10,000 undocumented people; many live in crowded conditions and most of them are essential*

workers who keep our city going. We need better access to testing, and we need to ensure that our folks at highest risk can easily get tested, whether or not they have symptoms.”

The coalition’s fourth and final criterion – A Seat at the Table – calls on the Governor to name a Recovery Advisory Board to advise him and the Command Center on decisions about future phases of reopening (and, if needed, reclosing) – and for the board to include, at a minimum, representation of essential workers, Black and Latinx communities, people with disabilities, LGBTQ+ people, older adults, and local public health officials.

*“COVID-19 is an infectious disease epidemic, but it is amplified by the other epidemics that we're facing at the same time - racial injustice, health inequities, and air pollution,” said **Dr. Regina LaRocque of the Division of Infectious Diseases, Massachusetts General Hospital; Associate Professor of Medicine at Harvard Medical School; and member of Massachusetts Coalition for Health Equity.** “We need a data-driven, transparent and inclusive response to these problems in Massachusetts, and one that puts essential workers and affected communities of color front and center.”*

106 organizations have endorsed the Criteria for an Equitable Reopening:

1. ACLU of Massachusetts
2. Allston Brighton Health Collaborative
3. American Federation of Teachers Massachusetts
4. American Friends Service Committee
5. Black Boston COVID-19 Coalition
6. Boston City Councilor Andrea Campbell
7. Boston Tenant Coalition
8. Boston University School of Social Work
9. Cambridge Women's Center (Women's Educational Center, Inc.)
10. Cape Cod Coalition for Safe Communities
11. Center for Health Law and Policy Innovation of Harvard Law School
12. Central MA Tobacco Free Community Partnership
13. Central Mass Green-Rainbow Chapter
14. Central Massachusetts Housing Alliance
15. Children's HealthWatch
16. Children's Mental Health Campaign
17. Chinese Progressive Association
18. CHNA 9
19. City Life/Vida Urbana
20. Clean Water Action
21. Climate Code Blue
22. Community Action Pioneer Valley
23. Community Economic Development Center-New Bedford
24. Community Labor United
25. DOVE, Inc.
26. Economic Mobility Pathways (EMPath)
27. Fenway Health
28. Franklin Community Co-op
29. Greater Lowell Health Alliance

30. Green & Healthy Homes Initiative
31. GreenCAPE
32. Groundwork Lawrence
33. Health Care For All
34. Health Law Advocates
35. Health Leads
36. Health Resources in Action
37. Homes for Families
38. IBPO432
39. Immigrants' Assistance Center, Inc.
40. Immigration Refugee Alliance, Falmouth
41. Initiative on Health and Homelessness at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health
42. Inquilinos Boricuas en Accion
43. Institute For Health and Recovery
44. Jamaica Plain Progressives
45. Jewish Alliance for Law and Social Action
46. John Snow, Inc.
47. Justice Resource Institute, Inc
48. Lawrence CommunityWorks, Inc.
49. MA Affiliate of the American College of Nurse Midwives
50. MA Food System Collaborative
51. MAPA Translations, Inc.
52. Massachusetts Appleseed Center for Law & Justice
53. Massachusetts Association for Mental Health (MAMH)
54. Massachusetts Association of Community Development Corporations
55. Massachusetts Association of Community Health Workers
56. Massachusetts Budget and Policy Center
57. Massachusetts Chapter of the National Organization for Women
58. Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless
59. Massachusetts Community & Banking Council, Inc.
60. Massachusetts Councils on Aging
61. Massachusetts Fair Housing Center, Inc.
62. Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition
63. Massachusetts Law Reform Institute
64. Massachusetts Public Health Association
65. Massachusetts Senior Action Council
66. Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children
67. MassCOSH
68. Medford People Power
69. Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC)
70. MLPB (f/k/a Medical Legal Partnership | Boston)
71. National Association of Social Workers, MA Chapter
72. New England United 4 Justice
73. Northeastern University Public Health Program
74. On The Rise, Inc.
75. One Family
76. Parent/Professional Advocacy League
77. Parenting Journey

78. Physicians for Policy Action
79. Planned Parenthood
80. Professional Staff Union (PSU/MTA)-Amherst and Boston Chapters
81. Project Bread
82. Public Health Institute of Western MA
83. The Quaboag Hills Community Coalition
84. Revere Youth in Action
85. Right to the City Boston
86. Rosie's Place
87. Saheli Inc.
88. Sierra Club Massachusetts Chapter
89. Simmons University MPH in Health Equity
90. St Mark Community Education Program
91. The Food Bank of Western Massachusetts
92. The Greater Boston Food Bank
93. The Joint Coalition On Health
94. The Latino Health Insurance Program, Inc.
95. TSNE
96. UMass Medical School Department of Family Medicine and Community Health
97. Union of Concerned Scientists
98. University Staff Association, UMass/Amherst
99. Viswanath Lab
100. Western MA Network to End Homelessness
101. Western Mass Area Labor Federation, AFL-CIO
102. Women's Health Institute
103. Worcester County Food Bank
104. Worcester Interfaith
105. YWCA Northeastern Massachusetts
106. 350 Central Mass

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