



COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS
THE GENERAL COURT
STATE HOUSE, BOSTON 02133-1053

July 14, 2020

His Excellency Governor Charles D. Baker
State House, Room #280
24 Beacon Street
Boston, MA 02133

The Honorable Secretary Marylou Sudders
Executive Office of Health and Human Services
One Ashburton Place 11th Floor
Boston, MA 02108

Re: Support to Accelerate Improvements in the Local Health System

Dear Governor Baker and Secretary Sudders:

Thank you for your all of your work on behalf of the Commonwealth, and especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. If this pandemic has taught us anything, it is that government can take broad scale action quickly when we make it a priority. The pandemic has highlighted our Commonwealth's many strengths, and also its weaknesses. It has shown us that government can rise to the occasion and create powerful, positive change to address those weaknesses and build for a better tomorrow.

It has become exceedingly clear that our local public health system presents us with an opportunity for taking that broad scale action quickly in order to build a stronger Commonwealth for everyone. We were pleased to pass Chapter 72 of the Acts of 2020, An Act Relative to Strengthening the Local and Regional Public Health System (also known as the State Action for Public Health Excellence, or SAPHE, Act), this past April, and we are grateful that you signed this important legislation into law.

In light of lessons learned during the COVID-19 pandemic, it is clear that we must now accelerate progress more quickly toward the goals of the law.

During this crisis, our local boards of health have been on the front lines of our state's response. Residents have relied on our local public health departments for their case investigation and contact tracing abilities, their recommendations and enforcement of isolation and quarantine, their ability to connect residents most in need with services to keep them healthy and economically secure, and their ability to interpret and act upon the guidance and orders coming from the state government that they have the responsibility to enforce.

However, the ability of our local boards of health to respond to the pandemic has been hampered by a fractured system of 351 separate boards that receive no direct state funding for core functions. As a result, boards have

inconsistent access to trained and credentialed staff, provide inconsistent enforcement of state public health guidance, and have widely varying abilities to collect and report data necessary for sound decision making.

These challenges have led to inequities in public health protections across municipalities, and they also put the entire state at risk. Because viruses do not respect municipal borders, the extreme variability of protections provided across municipal health departments increases danger and harm to all communities.

We stand ready to work with the Administration to accelerate improvements to our local public health system. We want to see a system that sets forth minimum basic public health protections, including support for regional collaboration and set workforce standards, and that provides adequate funding to support the core functions in every municipality.

Sincerely,

JO COMERFORD

State Senator

Hampshire, Franklin, Worcester district

JASON LEWIS

State Senator

5th Middlesex district

HANNAH KANE

State Representative

11th Worcester district

RUTH BALSER

State Representative

12th Middlesex district

SUSANNAH WHIPPS

State Representative

2nd Franklin district

NATALIE BLAIS

State Representative

1st Franklin district

ELIZABETH POIRIER

State Representative

14th Bristol district

MICHAEL MOORE

State Senator

2nd Worcester district

LINDSAY SABADOSA

State Representative

1st Hampshire district

BRIAN ASHE

State Representative

2nd Hampden district

HARRIETTE CHANDLER

State Senator

1st Worcester district

KAY KHAN

State Representative

11th Middlesex district

HAROLD NAUGHTON

State Representative

12th Worcester district

DENISE GARLICK

State Representative

13th Norfolk district

ERIC LESSER

State Senator

First Hampden and Hampshire district

JACK PATRICK LEWIS

State Representative

7th Middlesex district

DANIEL CAREY

State Representative

2nd Hampshire district

DAVID LEBOEUF

State Representative

17th Worcester district

TAMI GOUVEIA
State Representative
4th Middlesex district

MARY KEEFE
State Representative
15 Worcester district

WILL CROCKER
State Representative
2nd Barnstable district

MATHEW MURATORE
State Representative
1st Plymouth district

ROSELEE VINCENT
State Representative
16th Suffolk district

KEVIN HONAN
State Representative
17th Suffolk district

LINDA DEAN CAMPBELL
State Representative
15th Essex district

PAUL MARK
State Representative
2nd Berkshire district

CAROL DOHERTY
State Representative
3rd Bristol district

PATRICK O'CONNOR
State Senator
Plymouth & Norfolk district

CHRISTINE BARBER
State Representative
34th Middlesex district

MIKE CONNOLLY
State Representative
26th Middlesex district

JIM HAWKINS
State Representative
2nd Bristol district

TOM STANLEY
State Representative
9th Middlesex district

PAUL DONATO
State Representative
35th Middlesex district

MINDY DOMB
State Representative
3rd Hampshire district

STEPHAN HAY
State Representative
3rd Worcester district

JAMIE ELDRIDGE
State Senator
Middlesex & Worcester district

JULIAN CYR
State Senator
Cape & Islands district

STEPHEN ULTRINO
State Representative
33rd Middlesex District

CC:

The Honorable Lieutenant Governor Karyn Polito
Dr. Monica Bharel, Commissioner, Department of Public Health