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
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<tr>
<td>STEPHEN ULTRINO</td>
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CC:
The Honorable Lieutenant Governor Karyn Polito
Dr. Monica Bharesh, Commissioner, Department of Public Health