July 23, 2020

Governor Charlie Baker
Lieutenant Governor Karyn Polito
Massachusetts State House
Boston, MA 02133

Secretary Marylou Sudders
Executive Office of Health and Human Services
One Ashburton Place
Boston, MA 02108

Commissioner Monica Bharel
Massachusetts Department of Public Health
250 Washington St.
Boston, MA 02108

Re: Strengthening the Massachusetts Local Health System

Dear Governor Baker, Lt. Governor Polito, Secretary Sudders, and Commissioner Bharel:

We would like to thank the Baker-Polito Administration for your work in addressing the COVID-19 pandemic and for keeping the needs and priorities of municipalities at the forefront of your response. Throughout this crisis you have taken steps to address immediate concerns such as ensuring locals receive funding to maintain critical operations and you have also thought ahead to address future concerns by signing into law Chapter 72 of the Acts of 2020, An Act Relative to Strengthening the Local and Regional Public Health System, that will take steps to strengthen our local public health system. We thank you for signing this bill into law and we support you in accelerating the principles of this law and moving quickly to further strengthen our local public health system in anticipation of a fall surge.

We write to you as municipal leaders across the Commonwealth representing communities of varying sizes and geographies. We have witnessed firsthand the impact that COVID-19 has had on our cities and towns, and have watched as our municipal health officials have fought to keep our residents safe.

Our health departments and boards of health have played an integral role in a myriad of areas, including: case investigation and contact tracing, enforcing isolation and quarantine protocols, interpretation and enforcement of business guidance and state orders, organization and delivery of meals to food insecure households, collaborating and communicating with our first responders and public safety, and addressing questions and concerns of residents.

However, the ability of our local boards of health and health departments to respond to the pandemic has been hampered by a fractured system. Currently, each municipality operates its own board of health - 351 separate boards - that receive no direct state funding for core functions. This contributes to inconsistent messaging, interpretation, and capacity to enforce critical COVID-19 state guidance/orders. And with varying abilities to collect and report data, critical information sharing across municipalities is hampered. These challenges have led to inequities in public health protections for residents in cities and
towns across the state, and they put the entire state at risk, particularly as it comes to re-opening and reinvigorating our economy. Because viruses do not respect municipal borders, the extreme variability of protections provided across municipal health departments pose a risk and harm to all communities.

We appreciate your Administration working closely with local boards of health and glad to know you are considering options to strengthen and invest in this essential system. We stand ready to work with the Administration to accelerate improvements to our local public health system. As municipal leaders, we want to see a system that provides residents, regardless of where they live, with basic public health protections and that considers the need for adequate funding to support the core functions in every municipality. We look forward to working with your Administration to make improvements to our local public health system so that all our residents share the essential public health protections they deserve.

We support the Baker-Polito Administration’s efforts to accelerate improvements in the local public health system, so that it is better prepared to meet current and future challenges.

Sincerely,

Kassandra Gove, Mayor, Amesbury
Michael Herbert, Town Manager, Ashland
Brian Keir, Selectboard Member, Bernardston
Joshua Garcia, Town Administrator, Blandford
Barry Del Castilho, Selectboard Member, Buckland
Dena Wilmore, Chair, Selectboard, Buckland
Martin Walsh, Mayor, Boston
Louis DePasquale, City Manager, Cambridge
Andrew Golas, Town Administrator, Charlton
Thomas Ambrosino, City Manager, Chelsea
John Vieau, Mayor, Chicopee
Michael Slowinski, Selectboard Member, Colrain
Mark Thibodeau, Selectboard Member, Colrain
Robert Armstrong, Chair, Selectboard, Conway
Steve Bartha, Town Manager, Danvers
Trevor McDaniel, Selectboard Member, Deerfield
Nicole LaChapelle, Mayor, Easthampton
Mary Brazie, Selectboard Member, Egremont
Carlo DeMaria, Mayor, Everett
Yvonne Spicer, Mayor, Framingham
Greg Snedeker, Selectboard Member, Gill
Randy Crochier, Selectboard and Board of Health Member, Gill
Roxann Wedegartner, Mayor, Greenfield
Ashli Stempel-Rae, City Councilor, Greenfield
Otis Wheeler, City Councilor, Greenfield
Joseph Domelowicz, Jr., Town Manager, Hamilton
Robyn Provost-Carlson, Chair, Selectboard, Heath
Brian DeVriese, Selectboard Member, Heath
Hilma Sumner, Town Coordinator, Heath
Philip Lemnios, Town Manager, Hull
Orlando Pacheco, Town Administrator, Lancaster
Susan Chalifoux Zephir, City Councilor, Leominster
William Glabach, Chair, Selectboard, Leyden
Jeffrey Neipp, Selectboard Member, Leyden
Michele Giarusso, Municipal Assistant, Leyden
Eileen Donoghue, City Manager, Lowell
Thomas McGee, Mayor, Lynn
Paul Brodeur, Mayor, Melrose
Marcella Stafford Gore, Administrative Assistant, Monroe
Andrew Sheehan, Town Administrator, Middleton
Michael Nelson, Selectboard/Board of Health Member, Montague
Chris Boutwell, Selectboard/Board of Health Member, Montague
Richard Long, Selectboard Member, New Marlborough
Ruthanne Fuller, Mayor, Newton
David Narkewicz, Mayor, Northampton
Tony Mazzucco, General Manager, Norwood
Edward Bettencourt, Jr., Mayor, Peabody
Linda Tyer, Mayor, Pittsfield
Brian Arrigo, Mayor, Revere
Charles Sokol, Selectboard Member, Rowe
John Tynan, Selectboard Member, Savoy
Terry Narkewicz, Town Administrator, Shelburne
Kevin Mizikar, Town Manager, Shrewsbury
Joseph Curatone, Mayor, Somerville
Michael Sullivan, Town Administrator, South Hadley
Domenic Sarno, Mayor, Springfield
Sean Fitzgerald, Town Administrator, Swampscott
Doc Pruyne, Selectboard Member, Warwick
Jim Huebner, Selectboard Chair, Washington
Brian Domina, Town Administrator, Whately
Frederick Orloski, Selectboard Member, Whately
Joyce Palmer-Fortune, Selectboard Member, Whately
Jeffrey Hull, Town Manager, Wilmington
Austin Faison, Town Manager, Winthrop
Edward Augustus, City Manager, Worcester