

PRESS RELEASE

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Doctors, State Legislators, Community & Labor Leaders Press Baker Administration to Increase COVID-19 Protections Amidst Rise in Cases

BOSTON, MA - Nearly 20 organizations and over 200 physicians, state legislators, community and public health leaders have signed an [open letter](#) to Governor Baker and Massachusetts Legislators, demanding a comprehensive response to the current surge of COVID-19 that includes implementation of new stringent public health protections, to help Massachusetts residents comply with public health directives. The group will issue the letter publicly at a **virtual press conference on Tuesday, December 22, 2020 at 11 A.M via Zoom:** <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85496123190?pwd=bGNNaMi9NN3p4T3l0Ym5NLzFmRmhzd09>

More than half of Massachusetts' cities and towns are in the high-risk zone and COVID-19 case numbers are [70% higher than their peak](#) last April. Even as new science shows that [indoor dining is unsafe](#), Governor Baker refuses to take the substantive steps needed to curb infection rates, despite repeated warnings of the [Center for Disease Control](#), [public health experts](#), and [elected officials](#).

"Every day I tell patients to stay home when they are sick, but they can't if they can't put food on the table and don't have emergency sick leave." said Dr. Mansa Semanya, a family physician practicing in Boston and **member of the [Massachusetts Coalition for Health Equity \(MCHE\)](#), which sponsored the letter.** "Baker and our state legislators need to pass legislation that allows working people to protect themselves. That is the only way to slow the spread of COVID19 and protect the public health."

While many set hopes on the COVID-19 vaccine to return to normalcy, the letter signatories warn that [control of the COVID-19 infection rates](#) and [increased testing](#) remain essential to [ending the pandemic](#). Meanwhile, ten months into the pandemic, availability and accessibility of testing is insufficient, [workplace protections are lacking](#), [100,000 households](#) face risk of eviction, and local public health departments are egregiously underfunded.

"Our community members were struggling for workplace safety even before the pandemic," said **Natalicia Tracy, Executive Director of the Brazilian Workers Center, and press conference speaker.** "Now, where many frontline workers' families cannot eat if they don't work, employers are exploiting peoples' needs by ignoring safety. Employers know that the Baker administration never issued binding COVID-19 regulations and no violations will ever be

punished. Workplace infections are driving the pandemic in our state and the disproportionate sickness and death among our community. This is what racism looks like.”

“Local public health departments are on the frontlines of the pandemic, yet our system has long suffered from fragmentation, underfunding, and deep inequities in the ability of communities to carry out their responsibilities,” said **Maddie Ribble, Director of Public Policy for the Massachusetts Public Health Association and press conference speaker.**

“Viruses do not respect municipal borders; an equitable response and recovery will require strong local health protections for all communities. We simply cannot accept the status quo any longer. The time is now for the legislature and the Baker Administration to act boldly.”

As over half of Massachusetts cities and towns are considered [“high risk”](#) for COVID-19, over 100,000 families across the state face eviction, which advocates argue [feeds the pandemic](#). Evictions have led to over [433,700 COVID-19 cases and 10,700 additional deaths](#) nationally since the beginning of the pandemic.

“We have 100,000 families across the state facing eviction this winter.” said **Lady Lawrence Carty, Executive Director of Housing=Health** and press conference speaker. “We need comprehensive housing stability legislation now! In normal circumstances, an eviction crisis on this scale would be disastrous, but in a pandemic for many families, eviction equals death.”

Signatories of the open letter call the Baker administration’s most recent action [grossly insufficient](#), allowing high-risk activities such as [indoor dining](#) to continue even as the state opens field hospitals to treat a spillover of patients from hospitals. The governor and the legislature have also failed to take steps to ensure all residents are able to follow the state’s public health guidance, such as passing [comprehensive housing stability legislation](#), paid emergency sick leave, and providing support to small businesses and employees impacted by COVID-19 related closures.

“You don’t need an MD or a PhD to know that indoor dining is unsafe,” said **Dr. Lara Jirmanus, family physician practicing in Revere and a member of MCHE** and press conference organizer. “Talking and eating indoors, unmasked, with people outside of your household is almost guaranteed to spread the virus. Meanwhile, we are nearly a year into this pandemic and Massachusetts is still failing to guarantee broad access to rapid testing and economic relief to enable residents to stay home when they are sick and housing stability to ensure they have a home to stay in.”

Massachusetts’ residents overwhelmingly [support pandemic restrictions](#). The signatories on the letter emphasize a multi-pronged approach and have specifically requested Governor Baker and the Legislature to take the following steps designed to controlling the spread of COVID including:

- Close Indoor Dining, Movie Theaters, Casinos, Places of Worship, Gyms, and Limit restaurants to carry-out only
- Reinstate the Eviction Moratorium and pass comprehensive [housing stability legislation](#), as a lack of eviction protections is associated with a [five-fold increase](#) in COVID-19 mortality

- Implement a state-level relief package to protect individuals and save small businesses by tapping into remaining CARES act funding, the state's Rainy Day Fund and by applying for a loan through the Municipal Liquidity Facility
- Pass Emergency Sick time for patients isolating and quarantining after exposure to COVID-19
- Increase access to COVID-19 testing, especially in hard-hit communities, and decrease test turnaround time
- Increase funding to support local public health departments
- Implement mandatory workplace standards, as other states [like California have done](#).

Press conference speakers:

MC: Noel Sanders, Community Organizer, Boston Community Healthy Initiative

- Representative Mike Connolly of Somerville and Cambridge
- Professor Michael Mina, Associate Professor of Epidemiology, Harvard T. H. Chan School of Public Health
- Dr. Mansa Semanya, physician practicing in Boston, Member Massachusetts Coalition for Health Equity
- Lady Lawrence Carty, Housing=Health, Roxbury Neighborhood Community Land Trust
- Natalicia Tracy, Executive Director, Brazilian Workers' Center
- Maddie Ribble, Director of Public Policy, Massachusetts Public Health Association
- Hersch Rothmel, SEIU organizer
- Colin Killick, Executive Director, Disability Policy Consortium
- Dr. Lara Jirmanus, family physician practicing in Revere, Massachusetts Coalition for Health Equity

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The [Massachusetts Coalition for Health Equity](#) (MCHE) is a growing coalition of physicians, public health advocates, and community leaders united in their demand for a comprehensive and equitable response to the COVID-19 pandemic.