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Public Health Association Calls for Public Health Cabinet Position

Releases Candidate Questionnaire for Gubernatorial Candidates

BOSTON, MA – Today, the Massachusetts Public Health Association (MPHA) announced the release of a candidate questionnaire for current candidates in the Massachusetts governor’s race. The questionnaire asks each candidate to provide details on their public health-related platforms, including their position on creating a cabinet-level position to oversee public health policies statewide.

“The COVID pandemic has made it crystal clear that we need a robust public health system to keep us all safe and healthy. But here in Massachusetts we also witnessed the fallout – in delayed decision-making, confused priorities and poor planning – that resulted because public health leadership was not in direct communication with the governor,” said **Carlene Pavlos, Executive Director of the Massachusetts Public Health Association**. “If we are serious about reducing health inequities, the state’s public health leader must have a seat at the table with the other cabinet secretaries when policy is being made about the full range of issues that impact health – from the environment to food access to transportation.”

The questionnaire covers a broad range of public health policies, from strategies for reducing opioid abuse and improving air quality to continued support for COVID-19 testing and vaccination, increasing access to affordable housing and public transportation, reducing health inequities, and transforming the local public health system.

“After two years of a pandemic, it is clear that public health is a critical health and safety issue for every voter in the Commonwealth. With historic state revenue surpluses, federal monies yet to be spent, and a possible recession on the horizon, voters need to know how the next governor plans to invest in the social and structural conditions that keep people healthy and foster thriving communities, said **Damōn Chaplin, MPHA Board President Elect and Director of the New Bedford Health Department**. “The candidates’ responses to the MPHA questionnaire will shed light on how each candidate views public health and their priorities in the social determinants of health, including housing, transportation, and environmental justice.”

Questions include:

“What is your position on creating an Executive Office of Public Health, elevating the Commissioner of Public Health to the cabinet? “

“The COVID-19 pandemic has shown that the local public health system in Massachusetts is not adequately structured, staffed, or financed...The Commonwealth’s decentralized approach to delivering public health services leads to extreme inequity across municipalities. Every day, local public health departments are working behind-the-scenes to keep communities safe from a wide variety of threats, ranging from infectious disease to foodborne illness, water contamination, and lead poisoning. How will your administration invest in and collaborate with local boards of health and bolster the Commonwealth’s public health work force?”

“Massachusetts continues to struggle to address the opioid epidemic. Access to evidence-based treatment for substance use disorders is uneven across the state. 2021 was one of the deadliest years in Massachusetts’ opioid epidemic...During the pandemic, overdose rates have risen sharply for Black and Latine men in particular. These deaths are preventable. What is your plan to address the opioid epidemic and its root causes?”

“Transportation policy is climate policy...To improve air quality and address the climate crisis, Massachusetts must prioritize policies and investments that increase access to public transit. People are more likely to get out of their cars and onto buses when services are reliable, convenient, and affordable or free. For example, fare-free buses allow for all-door boarding, which makes boarding dramatically faster, reducing idling and therefore alleviating traffic, reducing emissions, and decreasing travel time for riders. If elected Governor, how would you approach reducing emissions in the transportation sector and ensure that decision-making power is shifted to communities overburdened by poor air quality?”

“What is your position on making RTA and MBTA buses fare-free?”

[To view the full questionnaire, click here.](#)

The Massachusetts Public Health Association (MPHA) is a nonprofit organization that promotes a healthy Massachusetts through advocacy, community organizing, and coalition building. We are leaders in the movement to create health equity by addressing the root causes of health and wellness. We promote policies that impact the major drivers of health outcomes, such as access to healthy food, safe affordable housing, and transportation. We also advocate for equitable public health services throughout the Commonwealth. To learn more, visit www.mapublichealth.org. ###