



SMART GROWTH AND REGIONAL COLLABORATION

April 6, 2023

The Honorable Ronald Mariano
Speaker of the House
State House, Room 356
Boston, MA 02133

The Honorable Karen Spilka
Senate President
State House, Room 332
Boston, MA 02133

The Honorable Aaron Michlewitz
Chair, House Committee on Ways & Means
State House, Room 243
Boston, MA 02133

The Honorable Michael Rodrigues
Chair, Senate Committee on Ways & Means
State House, Room 212
Boston, MA 02133

RE: H.2204/S.1334 SAPHE 2.0– Local Public Health Investments and Reforms

Dear Speaker Mariano, Senate President Spilka, and Chairs Rodrigues and Michlewitz:

On behalf of the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) and the municipalities we serve, I want to voice our deep appreciation for your leadership on the SAPHE Act, signed into law as [Chapter 72 of the Acts of 2020](#), which incorporated many of the recommendations of the [Special Commission on Local and Regional Public Health](#). Likewise, we are grateful for the investments dedicated to local and regional public health in Chapter 102 of the Acts of 2021 which has allowed for deeper coordination and facilitation on local and regional public health in every corner of the Commonwealth.

Despite these important steps forward, the Commonwealth still lacks a comprehensive statewide framework for public health services and staffing. It is critical that we fill these gaps so we can better address routine public health needs, and ensure that we're prepared for future public health crises. **We therefore respectfully request that you prioritize H.2204/S.1334 – SAPHE 2.0, filed by Representatives Kane and Garlick and Senator Comerford, and make every effort to pass this critical legislation early this session.**

The Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) serves as the Regional Planning Agency for the people who live and work in the 101 cities and towns in the Metropolitan Boston region, which includes roughly half the state's population and two-thirds of the state's jobs. Throughout the pandemic, MAPC was deeply involved in helping our cities and towns navigate both the direct and indirect impacts of COVID-19 and we remain committed to ensuring that our planning work addresses critical public health needs across our region. We center the social determinants of health in our work and partner closely with our cities and towns to integrate a public health approach to planning, policy, and projects.

Demands on local public health boards and staff were growing even before COVID-19 arrived in the Commonwealth with new protections to enforce, new conditions to address, and adoption of new upstream preventative public health measures (e.g., food insecurity). Staff and resources have long been strained trying to meet these vital responsibilities in the context of limited resources, local



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support, and community awareness of the work. This will continue to put the health of the entire state at risk as future public health challenges arise.

Unlike most states, Massachusetts does not have a county or regional system for public health. The Commonwealth has more local health departments than any other state in the U.S., even though it ranks 13th in the nation for population size and 44th in land area. The policy reforms included in SAPHE 2.0 would ensure minimum public health standards and workforce credentialing, incentivize cross-municipal and regional collaboration, create a uniform set of data standards and reporting, and train staff to make these reforms effective and meaningful.

These are all common-sense changes that will better prepare Massachusetts' public health infrastructure for future health crises. **In MAPC's work over the course of the pandemic and as we continue our recovery, we have seen the benefits of regional collaboration, and strongly urge increased support for this necessary collaboration through the passage of SAPHE 2.0 early this session.**

Thank you for your consideration of this letter. If you or your staff have questions or would like additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me, at 617-933-0703 or eweyant@mapc.org.

Sincerely,

Lizzi Weyant
Deputy Executive Director of Public Affairs and Advocacy