

METROPOLITAN MAYORS COALITION

a local initiative facilitated by METROPOLITAN AREA PLANNING COUNCIL

SANDY POOLER
Town Manager of Arlington

April 6, 2023

MICHELLE WU
Mayor of Boston

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

CHARLES C. KOKOROS
Mayor of Braintree

CHAS CAREY
Town Administrator of Brookline

YI-AN HUANG
City Manager of Cambridge

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

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

EDWARD KEEFE
Interim City Manager of Chelsea

CARLO DeMARIA, JR.
Mayor of Everett

GARY CHRISTENSON
Mayor of Malden

RE: SAPHE 2.0 Bill – Local Public Health Investments and Reforms

BREANNA LUNGO-KOEHN
Mayor of Medford

Dear Chairs Michlewitz and Rodrigues:

PAUL A. BRODEUR
Mayor of Melrose, Chair

RUTHANNE FULLER
Mayor of Newton

On behalf of the Metro Mayors Coalition, thank you for your leadership to support the Commonwealth through the COVID-19 pandemic and economic recovery. We appreciate and are grateful for the investments dedicated to local and regional public health in Chapter 102 of the Acts of 2021 and look forward to continuing to work with you to build a stronger public health system.

THOMAS P. KOCH
Mayor of Quincy

BRIAN ARRIGO
Mayor of Revere

KATJANA BALLANTYNE
Mayor of Somerville

GEORGE PROAKIS
City Manager of Watertown

Our local public health leaders continue to grapple with the unprecedented strain that COVID-19 put on our residents and communities, working nonstop as critical frontline responders to keep our residents safe even as the pandemic wanes. **The Metro Mayors Coalition respectfully requests that the Joint Committee on Ways and Means prioritize H.4328/S.1386 – SAPHE 2.0, filed by Representatives Garlick and Kane, and Senator Comerford and make every effort to pass this critical legislation before the end of this session.**

ANTHONY MARINO
Town Manager of Winthrop

The Metro Mayors Coalition is an organization of 16 cities and towns in the urban core of metropolitan Boston. The municipal officials comprising this group represent over 1.4 million residents in Arlington, Boston, Braintree, Brookline, Cambridge, Chelsea, Everett, Malden, Medford, Melrose, Newton, Quincy, Revere, Somerville, Watertown, and Winthrop.

Convened by the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC), our Coalition has been coming together since 2001 to share information and solve common problems with an eye toward regional solutions. Since the very first reported cases of COVID-19, we have convened Mayors and Managers across the Commonwealth with public health experts to support each other and share best practices, facilitating collaboration that has continued to be critical as we face ongoing waves of COVID-19 and other major public health challenges.

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As municipal leaders, we were asked to be the front-line support for our residents, addressing everything from food insecurity and classroom safety to testing and eventually vaccine clinics. We could not have accomplished that without the devoted and committed staff at local and regional public health departments.

Despite the dedication of local health staff and volunteers, the COVID-19 pandemic revealed the inadequacies and inequities of our municipally-based local public health system – and this will continue to put the entire state at risk. Unlike most states, Massachusetts does not have a county or regional system for public health. Massachusetts 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. In our Coalition’s work over the course of the pandemic, we have each seen firsthand the benefits of increased regional collaboration, and therefore, strongly urge the formalization of this necessary collaboration through the passage of SAPHE 2.0 this session.

The Legislature passed the State Action for Public Health Excellence Act, or SAPHE Act, which was signed into law as [Chapter 72 of the Acts of 2020](#), incorporating many of the recommendations of the [Special Commission on Local and Regional Public Health](#). The Metro Mayors Coalition believes that SAPHE 2.0 builds on this strong foundation to provide additional support and incentives for our critical public health infrastructure. This policy reform 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. These changes ensure that we will come out of this pandemic with a stronger public health system that works for all our residents.

Both branches have dedicated significant funding to this effort, most recently demonstrating a commitment to address health disparities, enhance public health data systems, and support workforce development and training through the allocation of over \$200 million in funding for local and regional public health in the Legislature’s final ARPA bill. These funds, which can be used through the year 2026, will provide municipalities with the financial resources they need to conduct those critical policy reforms outlined in the SAPHE 2.0 bill. Furthermore, the SAPHE 2.0 bill’s language indicates that such funds can be distributed through regular grants, competitive grants, technical assistance, as well as an appropriate formula devised by the Department of Public Health. The synergy of these funding mechanisms with those of the Legislature’s ARPA allocation for public health would easily allow for these funds to effectuate the provisions of SAPHE 2.0, while SAPHE 2.0’s reforms would also allow for these funds to affect more positive, lasting change for our local and regional public health systems than otherwise possible.

We must take this opportunity to bolster and strengthen the infrastructure and the workforce needed to manage ongoing public health needs and to prepare for future health emergencies. The

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need for these reforms has never been more evident, and we **strongly urge you to pass SAPHE 2.0 early in this session.**

Thank you for your consideration of this letter, and we look forward to collaborating with you to building a resilient and modernized local public health system. If you have any questions, please contact Lizzi Weyant, MAPC's Deputy Executive Director of Public Affairs and Advocacy, at 617-933-0703 or eweyant@mapc.org.

Sincerely,



Paul A. Brodeur
Mayor, City of Melrose
Chair, Metropolitan Mayors Coalition