

‘Still analyzing what it really means’ for public health — 3:15 p.m., January 28, 2025

**By Jason Laughlin, Globe Staff**

Carlene Pavlos, executive director of the Massachusetts Public Health Alliance, tried to maintain perspective amid the chaos and confusion that followed the OMB memo.

”We are really concerned about this newest order but also are still analyzing what it really means,” said Pavlos, whose organization, a nonprofit advocacy group, has been deeply involved in improving public health services in the state. “It isn’t clear on the face of it, even from the intent point of view, how broad and deep this order is. It’s not even clear if it’s legal, as power of the purse belongs to Congress.”

She, like many others, said the order as written didn’t make clear exactly what programs would experience a funding pause, but mirrored other administration messaging in its vagueness and sweep.

”All of it feels intentional to sow a sense of panic and chaos, uncertainty, all of which leads to fear,” Pavlos said. “Who has the power and what is the intent of this order? Is it intended to claw back money already in state hands, is it intended to not make new awards, is it intended to not follow through on existing awards?”

Federal funding plays a significant role in public health initiatives, she said. That includes federal block grants that support substance addiction services and maternal and child health programs, and federal money that goes directly to the Department of Public Health. The stated goal of the OMB memo, to target, “Marxist equity” programs in government, could be construed to include health equity programs that work to ensure access to health services for people in marginalized communities, Pavlos said.

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed and drew attention to the significant differences in health outcomes for people in poorer communities and people of color.