



THE GENERAL COURT OF MASSACHUSETTS  
STATE HOUSE, BOSTON 02133-1053

Hon. Charles D. Baker, *Governor*  
Commonwealth of Massachusetts  
24 Beacon St, Room 280  
Boston, MA 02133

May 5, 2020

Dear Governor Baker,

Thank you for your continued efforts to address the COVID-19 outbreak in a proactive and equitable manner. We are writing to you today to respectfully highlight some continuing disparities, and suggest a simple policy proposal to reduce them. Prioritizing mobile testing in senior, low income and public housing developments and drive through testing in communities with high rates of chronic illness, and where many low wage essential workers reside, would immediately remove barriers to screening, while helping to raise awareness of the severity and seriousness of this public health crisis among the most vulnerable communities.

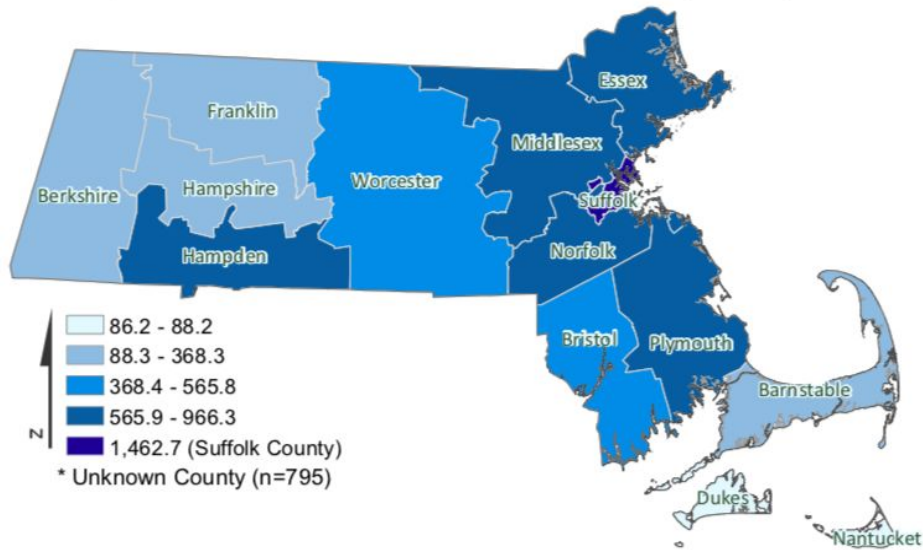
As the Boston Public Health Commission's 'Health of Boston 2016-2017' report shows, black and brown communities in Boston are more likely to suffer higher rates of chronic illness such as asthma, diabetes, heart disease, hypertension and diabetes. The prevalence of these pre-existing health disparities in communities of color put them at even greater risk of becoming seriously ill or facing deadly circumstances from infectious disease.

This is what we knew before the outbreak of COVID-19.

Recently, the State's Department of Public Health released statewide geographical and racial [data](#) which confirms that to be true. The state's [data](#) shows that cities like Boston, Brockton, Chelsea and Randolph are among the top five cities with the highest rates of COVID-19 infections in the Commonwealth. Within the City of Boston, which has the largest number of reported cases of COVID-19 – the communities of Dorchester, Mattapan, Hyde Park, and Roxbury account for 61% of all cases [reported](#) in Boston, while only making about approximately 33% of the City's population. This same trend has played out in communities of color statewide.

The correlation between contraction rates of COVID-19 and chronic disease, particularly in communities of color, is staggering. Recently, Boston Medical Center - the state's largest safety net hospital, [reported](#) that COVID-19 positive patients have much higher rates of underlying conditions including 34% with diabetes, 49% with hypertension and 52% with a BMI above 30. This confirms an CDC [report](#) released earlier in April, which conducted a nationwide study, which showed that 78% of people requiring admission to hospital intensive care units had at least one underlying health condition (diabetes, hypertension, heart disease and/or asthma).

Rate (per 100,000) of Confirmed COVID-19 Cases by County (n=56,462)\*



This is a crisis within a crisis.

While we applaud the Department of Public Health's for recently updating the Crisis Standards of Care guidelines, we must now focus on the front end of treatment: testing.

Currently, the State is prioritizing support for COVID-19 testing by the Massachusetts National Guard's mobile testing unit at nursing homes and long term facilities. There is good reason for that. Patients at long term care and nursing facilities are the most vulnerable to the worst outcomes of COVID-19. But low income seniors and families, who have higher rates of chronic illness, aren't far behind. That is why the National Guard's mobile testing unit should be authorized to perform mobile testing in senior and low income housing communities including all public housing communities as well as drive through testing in communities with high rates of chronic illness. Similar trends exist in senior, low income, and public housing communities statewide particularly in Western Massachusetts.

These policy actions would immediately remove barriers to critical COVID-19 screening, prioritizing the most vulnerable communities across the Commonwealth during the most significant public health crisis of our time.

The Massachusetts National Guard is a diverse and highly trained unit whose members live and work in communities across the Commonwealth. They are an outstanding humanitarian force – the first in the nation. Intervention from the Guard will be key in bringing access to testing in our most vulnerable communities as we fight this public health crisis statewide.

Thank you for your consideration of this critical matter.

Sincerely,

NICK COLLINS  
*State Senator*

RUSSELL HOLMES  
*State Representative*

CARLOS GONZALEZ  
*State Representative*

EDWARD KENNEDY  
*State Senator*

DIANA DIZOGLIO  
*State Senator*

BRENDAN CRIGHTON  
*State Senator*

JAMES WELCH  
*State Senator*

MARC PACHECO  
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*State Senator*

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*State Senator*

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*State Representative*

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*State Representative*

TACKEY CHAN  
*State Representative*