



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

28 May 2020

The Honorable Governor Charles Baker
Office of the Governor
Massachusetts State House
24 Beacon Street
Boston, MA 02133

Secretary Marylou Sudders
Executive Office of Health and Human Services
One Ashburton Place, 11th Floor
Boston, MA 02108

Re: Seeking expanded authorization to provide non-congregate shelters for people experiencing homelessness

Governor Baker and Madam Secretary,

Thank you for your service to the people of the Commonwealth during the COVID-19 pandemic.

We, the undersigned Members of the Massachusetts Legislature, **respectfully request that you seek immediate and expanded authorization from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to provide non-congregate shelter spaces to people experiencing homelessness regardless of their COVID-19 status.** This will allow unsheltered people as well as those who are unsafely housed, either in congregate settings or doubled up, to remain “safer at home” during the ongoing pandemic.

We have understood from homelessness service providers that as a phased reopening begins without a vaccine and without universally available and reliable testing, the risks associated with people experiencing homelessness remain high – not only to them and their families, but also to friends, coworkers, and the public health.

We thank you for your work to seek initial authorization from FEMA to provide non-congregate shelter to people who have tested positive for COVID-19 and for those who have known COVID

exposures, and for your recent reauthorization request to expand the authorization to include additional vulnerable populations. As the next renewal date rapidly approaches, we respectfully request that you work with the Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency (MEMA) to:

1. Outline the public health need for Massachusetts to assert broader authority to provide non-congregate shelter to all families, youth, young adults aging out of state custody, and unaccompanied adults experiencing homelessness, regardless of their COVID-19 status. As you know, FEMA requires that a statement of public health need accompany any expanded authorization request.
2. Request expanded authorization from FEMA to allow for de-population of congregate shelters for families, individuals, and youths into non-congregate shelters as described above in order to meet the public health need

With thousands of families, youth, and unaccompanied adults experiencing homelessness still sleeping in overcrowded congregate settings, co-shelter arrangements, and doubled up with high-risk family members, with limited or no access to COVID-19 testing, we must assume the virus can and will spread rapidly. While we are heartened to hear that the most recent data from the Department of Housing and Community Development indicates that there only have been 65 confirmed COVID-19 cases among families living in the Emergency Assistance family shelter program, we are concerned that without universal testing there has likely been more community transmission of COVID-19 than this data shows. In fact, in many cases where wide-scale testing has been made available for individuals experiencing homelessness who are living in congregate shelters, the percentages of positive cases among shelter residents have been disturbing. This includes point-in-time positive rates of 36% of the 408 guests tested at the Pine Street Inn, 37% of the 383 guests tested at the Southampton Street Shelter, 33% of the 152 guests tested at the Woods Mullen Shelter, and 43% of the guests tested at a shelter for unaccompanied adults in Worcester.

We ask that you seek expanded authorization and increased federal funding, and do all you can to provide safe shelter and services to more people experiencing homelessness in the Commonwealth during this pandemic. We remain committed to doing all we can in the Legislature to provide critical state-funded resources for housing, homelessness prevention, and emergency shelter.

Thank you for your partnership in meeting the needs of families, youth, and unaccompanied adults experiencing homelessness.

Sincerely,

Brendan P. Crighton
State Senator
Third Essex

Marjorie C. Decker
State Representative
25th Middlesex

Jo Comerford
State Senator
Hampshire, Franklin, Worcester

Kevin G. Honan
State Representative
17th Suffolk

Julian Cyr
State Senator
Cape and Islands

Kay Khan
State Representative
11th Middlesex

Christine P. Barber
State Representative
34th Middlesex

James J. O'Day
State Representative
14th Worcester

Michael J. Barrett
State Senator
Third Middlesex

Daniel R. Carey
State Representative
2nd Hampshire

Natalie M. Blais
State Representative
1st Franklin

Gerard J. Cassidy
State Representative
9th Plymouth

Michael D. Brady
State Senator
Second Plymouth and Bristol

Harriette L. Chandler
State Senator
First Worcester

Daniel Cahill
State Representative
10th Essex

Sonia Chang-Diaz
State Senator
Second Suffolk

Linda Dean Campbell
State Representative
15th Essex

Mike Connolly
State Representative
26th Middlesex

Peter Capano
State Representative
11th Essex

Cynthia Stone Creem
State Senator
First Middlesex and Norfolk

Claire D. Cronin
State Representative
11th Plymouth

Marcos A. Devers
State Representative
16th Essex

Sal N. DiDomenico
State Senator
Middlesex and Suffolk

Diana DiZoglio
State Senator
First Essex

Mindy Domb
State Representative
3rd Hampshire

Carolyn C. Dykema
State Representative
8th Middlesex

Lori A. Ehrlich
State Representative
8th Essex

James B. Eldridge
State Senator
Middlesex and Worcester

Nika C. Elugardo
State Representative
15th Suffolk

Paul R. Feeney
State Senator
Bristol and Norfolk

Dylan A. Fernandes
State Representative
Barnstable, Dukes and Nantucket

Cindy F. Friedman
State Senator
Fourth Middlesex

Sean Garballey
State Representative
23rd Middlesex

Anne M. Gobi
State Senator
Worcester, Hampden, Hampshire, and Middlesex

Carlos González
State Representative
10th Hampden

Tami L. Gouveia
State Representative
14th Middlesex

Jonathan Hecht
State Representative
29th Middlesex

Natalie M. Higgins
State Representative
4th Worcester

Adam G. Hinds
State Senator
Berkshire, Hampshire, Franklin and Hampden

Patricia D. Jehlen
State Senator
Second Middlesex

John F. Keenan
State Senator
Norfolk and Plymouth

Edward J. Kennedy
State Senator
First Middlesex

Kathleen R. LaNatra
State Representative
12th Plymouth

David Henry Argosky LeBoeuf
State Representative
17th Worcester

Eric P. Lesser
State Senator
First Hampden and Hampshire

Jack Patrick Lewis
State Representative
7th Middlesex

Jason M. Lewis
State Senator
Fifth Middlesex

David Paul Linsky
State Representative
5th Middlesex

Jay D. Livingstone
State Representative
8th Suffolk

Joan B. Lovely
State Senator
Second Essex

Adrian C. Madaro
State Representative
1st Suffolk

Elizabeth A. Malia
State Representative
11th Suffolk

Paul W. Mark
State Representative
2nd Berkshire

Mark C. Montigny
State Senator
Second Bristol and Plymouth

Michael O. Moore
State Senator
Second Worcester

Frank A. Moran
State Representative
17th Essex

Marc R. Pacheco
State Senator
First Plymouth and Bristol

Denise Provost
State Representative
27th Middlesex

Rebecca L Rausch
State Senator
Norfolk, Bristol and Middlesex

Maria Duaine Robinson
State Representative
6th Middlesex

David M. Rogers
State Representative
24th Middlesex

Daniel J. Ryan
State Representative
2nd Suffolk

Lindsay N. Sabadosa
State Representative
1st Hampshire

Jon Santiago
State Representative
9th Suffolk

Walter F. Timilty
State Senator
Norfolk, Bristol and Plymouth

José F. Tosado
State Representative
9th Hampden

Tommy Vitolo
State Representative
15th Norfolk

James T. Welch
State Senator
Hampden

Susannah M. Whipps
State Representative
2nd Franklin

cc: Director Samantha Phillips, Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency