

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **Public Health Leaders Praise Passage of Bill to Fix Local Public Health System *Call on Gov. Baker to Sign Without Delay***

**BOSTON, MA** – Today, public health leaders from across the Commonwealth praised the Massachusetts legislature for passing the Statewide Accelerated Public Health for Every Community (SAPHE 2.0) Act. If signed into law by Governor Charlie Baker, this landmark bill will overhaul the state’s broken public health system, providing better and more consistent public health protections to residents of all municipalities. The bi-partisan bill was passed unanimously in both chambers.

“This is a momentous day for health equity in Massachusetts,” said **Carlene Pavlos, Executive Director of the Massachusetts Public Health Association**. “The SAPHE 2.0 bill will ensure that strong public health protections are available to all residents of our Commonwealth – regardless of race, income, or zip code. We are deeply grateful to the leadership of the House and Senate and to our legislative champions, Senator Jo Comerford, Rep. Denise Garlick, and Rep. Hannah Kane. We call on Governor Charlie Baker to protect our communities by signing the bill into law without delay.”

SAPHE 2.0 creates minimum public health standards for every Massachusetts community, ensures a qualified workforce by credentialing public health workers, incentivizes municipalities to share services, creates a uniform data collection and reporting system, and dedicates state funding to support local boards of health and health departments.

“With the passage of this legislation, a person’s zip code will no longer determine the public health protections that they are afforded and local public health officials will have the resources they need to do their jobs,” said **State Senator Jo Comerford (D - Northampton)**, the Senate sponsor of the bill. “I am deeply grateful to Representatives Hannah Kane and Denise Garlick, Department of Public Health and Health and Human Services officials, the Massachusetts Public Health Association, and all who advocated for a better day for public health. That day has come.”

“With the passage of SAPHE 2.0, the legislature has made the fundamental reforms needed to provide every resident of our Commonwealth with a more efficient, effective and equitable local public health system,” said **State Representative Hannah Kane (R - Shrewsbury)**, lead House co-filer of the bill and a member of the Special Commission on Local and Regional Public Health. “I am grateful to the legislative leaders for the swift action on this legislation, Senator Comerford and Representative Garlick for their skillful leadership, and to the coalition of advocates, especially MPHA, who compelled this action with their powerful testimony.”

“The Legislature has focused on public health in a comprehensive, deliberative process since 2015 with the establishment of a Special Commission,” said **State Representative Denise Garlick (D - Needham)**, House co-filer of the bill. “The Special Commission’s 2019 report exposed the fractures in local public health, and the covid public health crisis only magnified those inequities. With the work accomplished by SAPHE 1.0 and the substantial investments made by the House and Senate in annual budgets and ARPA, SAPHE 2.0 provides the tools and direction to move local and regional public health forward. The passage of this legislation is the result of the extraordinary efforts of the frontline public health workers, advocates, experts and the legislative and executive branches working together to positively impact the lives of every resident in our Commonwealth.”

The bill implements [recommendations](#) of the Special Commission on Local and Regional Public Health, issued in June 2019, as well as a [recommendation](#) from the Report of the Joint Committee on COVID-19 and Emergency Preparedness and Management, which was issued in June 2022. The legislation also serves as a blueprint for the investments made in the recently enacted ARPA bill, which allocated over \$200 million for improvements to the local public health system.

“In my opinion, the best way to reduce health care costs is not to incur them at all,” said **Eileen McAnney, President of the Massachusetts Taxpayers Foundation** who served on the Special Commission on Local and Regional Public Health. “By investing in this kind of prevention, we can make our communities safer and avoid unnecessary healthcare costs.”

SAPHE 2.0 is supported by a broad coalition of public health experts, municipal and state officials, and academic leaders that have been urging the legislature to take action to transform the local public health system in Massachusetts. Leaders of the coalition include New Bedford Health Director Damōn Chaplin, Massachusetts Association of Health Boards Executive Director Cheryl Sbarra, and Franklin Regional Council of Governments Director of Community Services Phoebe Walker.

“Currently, many health departments lack adequate funding and staff, especially in low-income communities and rural areas,” said **Damōn Chaplin, Health Director for the City of New Bedford and Chair of the Massachusetts Large Cities Health Coalition**. “If signed into law, SAPHE 2.0 will lead to greater health equity by ensuring that all communities have the tools and resources they need to protect their residents.”

“Our local public health professionals and volunteers have worked heroically throughout the COVID-19 pandemic,” said **Cheryl Sbarra, Executive Director of the Massachusetts Association of Health Boards**. “But they have been working within a broken system. Today, the Massachusetts legislature has taken an historic step towards building a local public health system that we can all be proud of.”

“We have been raising the alarm about the state of local public health in Massachusetts for years,” said **Phoebe Walker, Director of Community Services for the Franklin Regional Council of Governments**. “Now, with the passage of SAPHE 2.0, we have achieved real progress in our effort to transform the entire local public health system, and this is particularly important for rural public health equity.”

“Municipal leaders across the Commonwealth were tasked with coordinating not only local, but also regional responses to the pandemic,” said **Paul Brodeur, Mayor of Melrose and Vice-Chair of the Metropolitan Mayors Coalition**. “That role made clear to me and many others that our current system doesn’t serve everyone. Our overworked local public health workers desperately need the resources this bill provides and residents deserve the access to foundational public health services it guarantees regardless of where they live.”

“Public health challenges don’t start or stop at municipal borders. We’ve long known this, but it became even more clear with the emergence of COVID-19,” said **Barry Keppard, Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) Director of Public Health**. “MAPC’s efforts to facilitate regional collaboration throughout the pandemic have shown us firsthand that communities can better protect residents’ health when they work together towards a set of shared goals. This bill provides unprecedented resources to support that collaboration, sets clear standards for performance and delivery of essential services, and will help to ensure we’re better prepared to respond to the public health challenges we know will come in the future.”

The Massachusetts Public Health Association (MPHA) is a nonprofit organization that promotes a healthy Massachusetts through advocacy, community organizing, and coalition building. We are leaders in the movement to create health equity by addressing the root causes of health and wellness. We promote policies that impact the major drivers of health outcomes, such as access to healthy food, safe affordable housing, and transportation. We also advocate for equitable public health services throughout the Commonwealth. To learn more, visit [www.mapublichealth.org](http://www.mapublichealth.org).

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