

UNITED WE STAND FOR PUBLIC HEALTH

January 14, 2009

The Honorable Deval Patrick
Governor of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts
State House
Boston, MA 02133

Re: Call to protect public health in the state budget

Dear Governor Patrick:

We are writing from a shared position of urgent concern for the fate of public health in Massachusetts. There is a critical role for public health in health cost containment and in achieving health equity for all populations in the Commonwealth and we urge you to carefully consider the likely outcomes of additional cuts.

Health care reform has been an indisputable success in terms of expanding health coverage to Massachusetts residents who were previously without affordable options. As you know, the impending challenges are to prove its sustainability in a period of economic downturn and to make certain it translates into a healthier Massachusetts.

Public health investments prevent future health care costs. Department of Public Health programs such as screening, immunization, smoking prevention, obesity prevention and infection control prevent poor health status and can reduce the need for costly medical care. Cuts to these programs will lead to increases in costly preventable illnesses that will burden our health care system, reduce productivity and learning, and undermine the success of health care reform.

Public health programs pick up where health coverage leaves off. Health care reform extended health coverage to thousands of Massachusetts residents who were previously uninsured. But individuals and families also need other critical services, especially in times of economic downturn. The Department of Public Health funds nutrition, substance abuse treatment, and shelter services and provides population-based disease prevention and health promotion programs. Alternatively, insurance-based disease management programs are difficult to implement with low income populations, given the high level of churn that exists.

Public health programs protect the Commonwealth's most vulnerable residents and reduce health disparities. Cuts to public health disproportionately impact underserved populations. Low income populations and immigrant communities disproportionately use urgent care and are among those most likely to fall through the gaps of health care reform. They are most likely to rely on public health services for basic needs and their health will suffer the most with cuts to Department of Public Health services such as HIV/AIDS as well as Hepatitis C prevention and treatment, family planning, school-based health services and public hospital cuts.

We stand with you as the state and all of us weather severe budget shortfalls and continued projections of lower-than-anticipated revenue. We support additional state measures to increase revenues. At the same time, as we anticipate additional 9C cuts and the FY10 budget process, we are called to speak out for the strategic importance of prevention and protection in our health care system and to ask you to protect public health from further cuts, given the cuts recently borne by this department.

The Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH)'s October 2008 9C cut of \$28,280,386 was 4.78% of its FY09 budget, **one of the highest percentage cuts of any EOHHS agency and among the highest percentage cuts for any area of state government.**

As a result of the October 2008 9C cuts, MDPH lost nearly 100 positions, including approximately 50 through involuntary layoffs. Major reductions in core services public health included:

- \$2.6 million loss of **public health hospital care** for some of the state's most vulnerable patients;
- over \$6 million in cuts to **adult and pediatric immunizations**, resulting in loss of vaccines for nearly 100,000 vulnerable elders of deadly illnesses and requiring the state to stop purchasing rotavirus vaccine for infants effective 7/1/09;
- over \$3 million in cuts to existing **substance abuse treatment services**, plus \$5 million cut from planned secure treatment for opiate addictions;
- over \$1.7 million in **family planning and family services cuts**, putting teenagers and low income individuals at higher risk for unwanted pregnancies;
- over \$1.5 million in cuts to **HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment** services, risking unnecessary spread of this disabling and expensive illness;
- over \$1 million in cuts to **early intervention programs**, making it more difficult for children with developmental disabilities to get services;
- closure of **STD clinics** across the state;
- cuts to an array of **disease prevention and health promotion programs**, including teen pregnancy, dental health, smoking, suicide prevention, infection control;
- 9% reduction in **environmental health services**, resulting in reduced support for local public health on food protection, fish advisories, cancer studies, and air quality inspections;
- over \$500,000 cut from **school health services**, an important source of health and preventive care for, and monitoring of, children which included reductions in mental health and substance abuse services in school-based health centers;
- cuts in **state laboratory services**, compromising disease surveillance such as identifying and responding to meningitis and flu outbreaks.

Additional 9C cuts in January would further compromise the department's capacity to prevent

illnesses and injuries, manage chronic disease, treat vulnerable patients, and protect families and communities across the state. Further, public health cuts also threaten the loss of federal funding, which will only exacerbate program support, and will invariably shift costs to other public agencies, including MassHealth, Commonwealth Care and local government.

These programs and services, still being rebuilt from the devastating cuts of FY2003, are critical to not only the physical, but also to the economic health of the Commonwealth. Please recognize the core value of public health- the prevention of expensive illnesses and injuries down the road—by ensuring that its programs are spared from devastating cuts this go-round.

cc: JudyAnn Bigby, Secretary of EOHHS
Leslie Kirwan, Secretary, Administration and Finance
John Auerbach, Commissioner, MDPH

Signed,

Joan Whitaker, Director of Health Services,
for **Action for Boston Community Development**

Rebecca Haag, President and CEO,
for **Aids Action Committee**

Joe Carleo, Executive Director,
for **AIDS Housing Corporation**

Joe McKee, Executive Director,
for **AIDS Project Worcester, Inc.**

Marc Hymovitz, Director of Government
Relations, for **American Cancer Society**

Allyson Perron, Director of Advocacy,
for **American Heart/Stroke Association**

Epi Bodhi, Director of Public Health,
Amherst Health Department

Baystate Health

Robert Taube, Executive Director,
for **Boston Health Care for the
Homeless Program**

Harold Cox, Associate Dean, Public Health
Practice, BU School of Public Health

Valerie Tebbetts, Acting Executive Director,
for **Boston Living Center**

Barbara Ferrer, Executive Director,
for **Boston Public Health Commission**

John Gatto, Executive Director,
for **Cambridge Cares about AIDS**

Craig Slatin and Barbara Mawn, Directors,
for **The Center for Health Promotion and
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Gaenslie Lamour, Program Manager,
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Education & Research**

Deborah Dickerson, Director of Community Health
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Clean Water Action

William Walczak, CEO,
for **Codman Square Health Center**

Paul Marcus, Executive Director,
for **Community Change**

David Waters, Executive Director,
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Joel Abrams, CEO,
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Andrew Morehouse, Executive Director,
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Alan Balsam, Director,
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Friends of the State Laboratory Institute

Roberta Gianfortoni, Assistant Dean of
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Ismael Rivera, Director,
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Amy Whitcomb Slemmer, Executive Director,
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Sheldon Barr, President and CEO,
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**The Health Foundation of Central
Massachusetts**

Lianne Cook, Executive Director,
for **Health Quarters**

Rev. Edward Burks, Director,
for **HIV/AIDS Services of Greater
Love Tabernacle**

The Hope Coalition

Mary Nee, Executive Director, for **hopeFound**

Douglas Brooks, Executive Director,
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Lisa Renee Holderby, Executive Director,
for **Massachusetts Association of Community
Health Workers**

Patricia Quinn, Executive Director,
for **Massachusetts Alliance on Teen Pregnancy**

Marcia Benes, Executive Director,
for **Massachusetts Association of Health Boards**

Nancy Carpenter, Executive Director,
for **Massachusetts Coalition of School-Based
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Martha Levine, President,
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Massachusetts Family Planning Association
Susan Servais, Executive Director,
for **Massachusetts Health Council**

Neil Cronin, Policy Analyst/Advocate,
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Andi Mullin, Legislative Director,
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**Massachusetts Organization for Addiction
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Valerie Bassett, Executive Director,
for **Massachusetts Public Health Association**

Ray Considine, President,
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Vicker V. DiGravio, III, President and CEO,
for **Mental Health and Substance Abuse
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Gary Daffin, Executive Director,
for **Multicultural AIDS Coalition**

Andrea Miller, Executive Director,
for **NARAL Pro-Choice Massachusetts**

Nancy Bucken, Executive Director,
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Susan Oleksiw, Executive Director,
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Project ABLE

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