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HEALTH EXPERTS, LEGISLATORS, AND COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS URGE GOVERNOR TO CURB COVID-19 TRANSMISSION AMIDST CONTAGIOUS VARIANTS, HOLIDAY SEASON

Sign-on letter and public health policy proposal for Governor Baker proposes data-driven solutions to reduce COVID-19 transmission in schools, workplaces, and frontline communities

BOSTON, MA – This afternoon, **Senator Becca Rausch (D-Needham)** and a dozen state legislative colleagues delivered a letter to Governor Baker urging the administration to adopt a slate of data-driven public health policies set forth in a Massachusetts COVID-19 Action Plan, crafted and endorsed by a coalition of over 100 public health and medical professionals and 36 community organizations, to curb the spread of COVID-19 in the Commonwealth. This broad support comes amidst a winter surge of the Delta variant, detection of the Omicron variant in Massachusetts, and increasing virus transmission during the holiday season.

On Monday morning, Governor Baker announced an effort to distribute 2.1 million rapid COVID-19 tests to high-risk municipalities, but noted that his administration has [no intention to reinstate Massachusetts' statewide mask mandate](#) during a winter surge of the Delta variant, which has caused a doubling of COVID hospitalizations over the last month. Schools have experienced a [notable spike in outbreaks](#), and stark racial and socioeconomic disparities of vaccination rates continue to persist in Massachusetts, with the proportion of people with 2 doses ranging from 52.1% to over 95% across Massachusetts towns.

“Experts confirm that testing is not enough,” the letter said. “Our constituents and communities need a multi-pronged approach to combat COVID-19 and protect public health, especially through these colder months.”

The Massachusetts COVID-19 Action Plan provides a comprehensive public health policy proposal for the Commonwealth’s schools, workplaces, health care providers, local health boards and frontline communities, drafted by **Dr. Julia Koehler, Dr. Julia Raifman, and Dr. Regina LaRocque** in partnership with numerous public health leaders and community organizations. To avoid crises of hospital resources, acute and chronic disease, deaths, long-term disability, and orphaning of children, the statewide coalition is encouraging the Baker Administration to:

- Establish a statewide indoor masking policy in line with [CDC recommendations](#), mandating county-based mask wearing predicated on local COVID-19 transmission risk
- Fund and staff daily mobile vaccination clinics in frontline communities disproportionately represented in COVID-19 cases
- Curb viral spread in workplaces through statewide workplace safety standards as well as paid sick time for employees experiencing COVID-19 symptoms, potential exposures, or temporary adverse effects from vaccination
- Protect against foreclosures, evictions and rent increases to decrease home crowding

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- Reduce in-school transmission through universal masking and providing sufficient funding and staffing for contact tracing, opt-out pool testing, and remote learning options for infected children
- Support frontline communities and local boards of public health through culturally relevant outreach, technical and infrastructural assistance to boards of health and community health centers, and financial support for struggling residents, regardless of immigration status

“Protecting children from COVID-19 and answering parents’ concerns about vaccines in a culturally appropriate way is critically important, because it’s not true that children don’t get very sick from COVID,” said **Dr. Julia Koehler**, Pediatric Infectious Disease specialist and Assistant Professor of Pediatrics at Harvard Medical School. “Children also get long COVID, and there are now concerns that children might have more severe disease from Omicron than from previous variants.”

“The omicron variant is projected to take over in Massachusetts by January,” said **Dr. Regina LaRocque**, an infectious disease physician and associate professor of medicine at Harvard Medical School. “It’s absolutely essential for everyone in the state to have boosted vaccination, but we can’t rely on vaccines alone to control this surge. We must use all of the tools at our disposal to protect people.”

“Mask policies are the opposite of lockdowns or school closures,” said **Dr. Julia Raifman**, assistant professor at Boston University School of Public Health. Mask policies help us continue to come together to reduce spread at work, in schools, and in public spaces more safely during surges. Mask policies are especially important while we continue to do the work to communicate about and deliver vaccines to the 11 Massachusetts Equity Communities with 40% or more of the population not yet vaccinated. I am so glad to see Governor Baker deliver free rapid tests to equity communities and hope he will also expand on the work Project N95 has done to deliver free, high quality masks to essential workers and low-income schools.”

“While I am pleased that the Baker Administration committed to free at-home rapid COVID-19 testing in our most vulnerable communities, we must go further,” said **Senator Becca Rausch**. “Our Commonwealth’s public health experts and frontline workers know exactly what we must do to safeguard our communities’ health and curb COVID-19 transmission. We have the plan; now we need swift action to keep our kids in schools, our families safe, and our businesses open.”

“The nurses and healthcare professionals of the Massachusetts Nurses Association support a multi-pronged approach to combating the latest COVID-19 surge that ensures patients are able to safely use essential healthcare services,” said **Katie Murphy, practicing ICU nurse and Massachusetts Nurses Association president**. “The Commonwealth must protect essential services such as behavioral health, hold hospitals accountable for improving conditions and staffing appropriately, and implement policy changes that reduce disparities in healthcare, education, food and housing access.”

“COVID-19 devastated Chelsea a year and a half ago, due to lack of preparedness, action, and response to the pandemic as it arrived in Massachusetts,” said **Cristina Alonso, Health Equity Specialist for La Colaborativa**. “We now have the data, information to prevent transmission, and capacity on-the-ground to save lives in our community as Omicron and the winter holidays approach. It is our responsibility to take action now to protect our most vulnerable communities.”

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In addition to the public health and medical experts who signed onto the Massachusetts COVID-19 Action Plan, the following 36 community organizations also endorsed the policy proposal:

Agencia ALPHA
Allston Brighton Health Collaborative
Boston Immigrant Justice Accompaniment Network
Brazilian Women's Group
Community Action Agency of Somerville, Inc.
Center to Support Immigrant Organizing
City Life/Vida Urbana
Comité TPS Massachusetts
Equity Now & Beyond
Families for COVID Safety (FamCOSa)
The Food Bank of Western Massachusetts
GreenRoots
Groundwork Lawrence
Haitian Americans United, Inc.
La Colaborativa
La Comunidad, Inc., Everett
Immigrant Service Providers Group/Health
Immigrants' Assistance Center, Inc. (IAC)
Jamaica Plain Progressives

Lundberg Health Advocates
Massachusetts Climate Action Network
Massachusetts Coalition for Occupational Safety and Health
Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless
Massachusetts Jobs with Justice
Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition
Massachusetts Nurses Association
Massachusetts Public Health Association
Massachusetts Voter Table
Metrowest Worker Center - Casa
New England United 4 Justice
St. Mark Community Education Program
Student Clinic for Immigrant Justice
True Alliance Center, Inc.
Union of Minority Neighborhoods
United Food and Commercial Workers Local 1445
We Got Us Empowerment Project

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Senator Becca Rausch represents the Norfolk, Bristol and Middlesex District, comprised of Attleboro, Franklin, Millis, Natick, Needham, Norfolk, North Attleborough, Plainville, Sherborn, Wayland, Wellesley, and Wrentham. Senator Rausch serves as the Senate Chair of the Joint Committee on Environment, Natural Resources, and Agriculture and the Senate Vice Chair of the Joint Committee on State Administration and Regulatory Oversight.