

April 16, 2020

URGENT Action Needed Avoid Deaths in Massachusetts Long-term Care Facilities

His Excellency, Charles Baker
Governor of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Massachusetts State House
Office of the Governor, Room 280
Boston, MA 02133

The Honorable Karen Spilka
Massachusetts Senate, President
24 Beacon Street, Room 356
Boston, MA 02133

The Honorable Robert DeLeo
Massachusetts House of Representatives, Speaker
24 Beacon Street, Room 332
Boston, MA 02133

Dear Governor Baker, Senate President Spilka and Speaker DeLeo:

Residents of nursing facilities in Massachusetts are in grave danger. As of [April 15, 2020](#), 48% of reported COVID-19 deaths in Massachusetts were in long-term care facilities. From [April 10, 2020](#) to April 15, 2020 there were 283 deaths attributed to COVID-19 reported in long-term care facilities. Over the same period, the number of reported cases by residents and healthcare workers increased by >95% and the number of facilities reporting at least one case of COVID-19 increased by >25%. The state's actions to expand testing capacity, distribute personal protective equipment (PPE), and support staff are woefully insufficient. **The data clearly demonstrate the need for immediate action to protect staff and residents in long-term care facilities.**

Since early March, the COVID-19 Policy Alliance (led by MIT faculty, with participation from MIT EMBA's and other members of the community) has worked intensively to raise awareness of these dangers, and to secure essential testing, acquire personal protective equipment, and institute 'hero's pay' for frontline workers – to protect the residents of long-term care facilities and the people who care for them.

On April 14, 2020, Tara Gregorio, President of the Massachusetts Senior Care Association (MSCA), issued a clear and powerful call to action, addressed directly to the Governor of Massachusetts, the President of the Massachusetts Senate, and the Speaker of the State House. We fully support every particular of Ms. Gregorio's letter and call on the State to:

1. Immediately expand and routinely test both symptomatic and asymptomatic nursing home residents and frontline staff. The Commonwealth's Mobile Testing program must be expanded to allow for rapid and repeat testing of both the residents and staff of long-term care facilities. Mass Health reimbursement currently made available via the Command Center to ONLY to one mobile testing provider under the state program must be authorized for use by the MSCA's surveillance testing program (and other similar programs). Turnaround times for tests must be accelerated to 24 hours or less to enable long-term care facilities to make decisions that reduce the spread of COVID-19.

2. Immediately prioritize personal protective equipment (PPE) for the safety and health of residents and frontline staff by ensuring an adequate supply of N95 and surgical masks, gowns, eye shields and gloves, which are desperately needed to safely treat residents and protect frontline workers. To the extent the state cannot provide the necessary PPE in a timely manner, all emergency resupply purchases via MSCA should be reimbursed entirely by the state.

3. Immediately expand state resources to fund a “hero” wage of double time and deploy the National Guard or Medical Corp to help staff the state’s nursing facilities. The state’s latest actions to increase staff levels, including providing a \$1000 bonus to individuals who apply to positions through a state portal, are woefully insufficient. We must do MUCH MORE to compensate those who are risking their health and lives on a daily basis. The state should immediately provide a \$130 million dollar monthly budget specifically to fund overtime costs, hiring of new staff, and double time for ‘hero’s pay’ for all frontline staff, and ensure the safety of ALL staff and residents through the consistent availability of appropriate PPE.

Ms. Gregorio has provided the roadmap that our political leaders need. We are calling on Massachusetts leadership to act decisively in support of long-term care facility residents and staff. These are our parents, grandparents, and the people who care for them, and far too many are dying. We must do everything we can to protect them in this hour of need.

Sincerely,

Simon Johnson, Kate Kellogg, and Retsef Levi of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Sloan School of Management

The COVID-19 Policy Alliance