



MASSACHUSETTS MEDICAL SOCIETY

Every physician matters, each patient counts.

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF H.2204/S.1334
AN ACT RELATIVE TO ACCELERATING IMPROVEMENTS IN THE LOCAL AND
REGIONAL PUBLIC HEALTH SYSTEM TO ADDRESS DISPARITIES IN THE DELIVERY OF
PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICES (SAPHE 2.0)
JOINT COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC HEALTH
MAY 4, 2023

The Massachusetts Medical Society (MMS) is a professional association of over 25,000 physicians, residents, and medical students across all clinical disciplines, organizations, and practice settings. The Medical Society is committed to advocating on behalf of patients, to give them a better health care system, and on behalf of physicians, to help them provide the best care possible.

The Medical Society seeks to work in collaboration with local, state, and federal public health agencies, hospitals, and others responsible for emergency preparedness and disaster management, on the development, coordination, and facilitation of educational initiatives, communications systems, and integrated response plans for the medical community to minimize the consequences of natural or man-made disasters and other public health emergencies. We've long-advocated for adequate resources, especially for populations with special medical needs, during disasters or those that have been historically marginalized or made vulnerable, and for community engagement in all phases of preparedness planning.

The overarching intent of H.2204/S.1334 is to reduce inequities among the 351 local boards of health, which is consistent with our long standing public health policies. H.2204/S.1334 would ensure minimum public health standards for every community and increase public health capacity and effectiveness by encouraging municipalities to share services. It also creates a uniform data collection and reporting system and establishes a sustainable state adjunct funding mechanism. This last provision is important because retaining a system funded only by local tax dollars exacerbates social barriers to health and inequities among local public health services. Additionally, this bill mandates that every law and public health policy set forth by the Commonwealth be followed in every community in the state, ensuring public health services are provided to all residents equitably.

While the administration and the legislature should be commended on how it promptly and effectively it addressed the COVID pandemic, that public health emergency exposed significant inequities in the local

boards of health. Until 2021, local health boards received little state support and relied heavily on local property taxes, which led to wealthier communities having large departments with expert nursing and inspectional staff, while some rural or economically disadvantaged communities have just a volunteer board or even a single part-time person paid through fees or local taxes to do restaurant inspections.

In 2020, acting on a 2019 report of the Special Commission on Local and Regional Public Health, the legislature created the first ever local public health line-item in the state budget that put in place some first steps toward fulfilling the commission's recommendations, including creating training and grant programs and helping communities share regional public health services. In November 2021, the Legislature approved spending \$200 million in federal COVID recovery money over five years to bolster local public health departments. Passage of H.2204/S.1334 will guide the Commonwealth in building on that progress, reduce current inequities in our local boards of health, and implement the commission's remaining recommendations.

The MMS urges your support for H.2204/S.1334 and hopes that the bill will make it to the Governor's desk once more and be signed into law. Thank you for your consideration of our comments.