



COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS
THE GENERAL COURT
STATE HOUSE, BOSTON 02133-1053



MaryLou Sudders, MSW, ACSW, Secretary, Command Center
Massachusetts Executive Office of Health and Human Services
1 Ashburton Place, 11th floor
Boston, MA 02108

Monica Bharel, MD, MPH, Commissioner
Massachusetts Department of Public Health
250 Washington Street
Boston, MA 02114

August 24, 2020

Dear Secretary Sudders and Commissioner Bharel:

As members of the legislative delegation representing residents in Hampshire County, we are writing to request a stop-the-spread state-funded COVID-19 testing site in Hampshire County.

In the past two weeks, two neighboring towns (Granby and South Hadley) alternated being designated as high-risk communities. Colleges and institutions of higher learning are operational in the county, with many students (estimates in the thousands) living off campus especially in the Amherst area.

As you know, there are currently only three free state-supported COVID-19 testing sites available to symptomatic and asymptomatic individuals in western Massachusetts, all of which are located in Hampden County, presenting significant obstacles to Hampshire County residents. In areas outside of major cities, like in western Massachusetts, public transit between counties is challenging, sometimes nonexistent. A Hampshire County free testing site could be readily available by public transit to Hampshire County residents as well as much closer to individuals living in Franklin County. The town of Amherst has expressed its interest in hosting such a site.

During the pop-up testing program earlier this summer following the racial justice protests, we were grateful for the Administration's recognition of the need for a centrally-located site in Hampshire County. Working together, we were able to locate a site at Cooley Dickinson Hospital in Northampton. As a result of such strong interest on the part of residents, the site was very popular. Thanks to the state's support, the site was able to extend its service for an additional day. Our constituents remain concerned, interested, and committed to being part of the solution to the pandemic. The influx of students and the likelihood that many residents live and work in different communities, often crossing boundaries between low and high risk, underscores the need expressed by our constituents. A county testing site would support their interest in learning their status and taking the necessary steps (self quarantine, isolation, contact tracing) to contain the pandemic.

For example, a resident of Hampshire County recently shared her experience trying to secure testing. She wrote, *"I did want to voice my concerns about the lack of COVID-19 testing that is available in Western Massachusetts. I recently was in 'close contact' with someone that tested positive at my work, so I had to get a test in Worcester, which was the closest location that was offering rapid testing. While there are places in the area that have regular testing, I tried to get an appointment but they were booked for the next two days and then the test results could take three-seven days - with the importance of stopping the spread and contract tracing I felt like this was not even remotely an option. I am lucky that I had the means to drive myself to Worcester and pay for a rapid test, but I of course know that there are so many people in our region that may not be able to do this. I trust you are already on this, but I wanted to voice my concerns especially as more people are returning to work, schools re-opening, etc."*

In this case, this constituent acted as her own contact tracer; the lack of additional state supported test sites was a clear barrier. Only through her persistence was she able to access testing.

We have understood from your team that the data will drive your decision. With that in mind, our request is made all the more urgent by the ways in which the current community data map fails to paint a nuanced picture for small communities like the ones

we represent. We have considerable concern that our communities are interpreting their “white” status on the map as an indication of zero risk (when that’s absolutely not necessarily the case) leaving our region more vulnerable to spikes like the ones that hit South Hadley and Granby.

Thank you for your consideration of this request, we look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

MINDY DOMB

State Representative
Third Hampshire District

JO COMERFORD

State Senator
Hampshire, Franklin, Worcester

NATALIE M. BLAIS

State Representative
First Franklin District

ANNE GOBI

State Senator
Worcester, Hampden, Hampshire & Middlesex

DANIEL CAREY

State Representative
Second Hampshire District

ADAM HINDS

State Senator
Berkshire, Hampshire, Franklin & Hampden

THOMAS PETROLATI

State Representative
Seventh Hampden District

ERIC LESSER

State Senator
First Hampden & Hampshire

TODD SMOLA

State Representative
First Hampden District

JOHN VELIS

State Senator
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SUSANNAH WHIPPS

State Representative
Second Franklin District