



Massachusetts General Court

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
(Gordon)

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**Rep. Gordon Provides March 25 Update
On State Efforts to Combat COVID-19**

Representative Ken Gordon (D-Bedford) provided an update today regarding the State's efforts to combat COVID-19 and support residents throughout the public health emergency.

Governor Charlie Baker issued an emergency order extending the closure of all public and private schools, and all non-emergency childcare programs, until May 4 in an effort to prevent the further spread of COVID-19 in the Commonwealth. This order extends school closures one week beyond what would have been spring vacation in Bedford, Burlington, and Wilmington. The extension is intended to provide school administrators and educators time to expand remote learning capabilities and ensure the completion of course requirements. The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) will issue guidance for parents regarding online learning on Thursday morning.

During this crisis, grocery stores will not longer accept re-useable plastic bags. They may be unsafe for workers to handle, so during this crisis the stores will again package merchandise in paper or plastic bags. This order temporarily suspends the plastic bag bans in Bedford, Burlington, and Wilmington. Stores will not be allowed to charge for plastic or paper bags.

Grocery stores will be required to offer hand sanitizer and disinfectant wipes, as many markets have been doing thus far, free of charge at points of contact. They will be required to clean shopping carts, as they do counters, handles and shelves. They are also required to provide one hour per day for the exclusive use of shoppers over 60. They are further required to develop social distancing policies, to keep customers six feet apart and six feet from workers. All self-serve food service will temporarily cease.

The Governor's order included protections for renters and homeowners who are struggling to keep up with bills. The Division of Banks advised financial institutions to wait 60 days before reporting missed payments to credit agencies and to delay foreclosures by 60 days. To help

renters, the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) will temporarily suspend terminations of federal and state rental vouchers. The Department also recommended that all state aided low-income housing owners and affordable housing operators suspend non-essential evictions, especially when lost income or unemployment is the reason that a tenant is unable to make rent. Affordable housing operators are advised to work with their tenants to develop payment plans and make them aware of financial relief options.

Families who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless should [seek aid through the Residential Assistance for Families in Transition \(RAFT\)](#) program. RAFT offers flexible financial assistance to help eligible families secure stable housing. The Baker Administration announced that MassHousing will transfer \$5 million to DHCD for the COVID-19 RAFT program.

Representative Gordon also provided an update on his recent efforts to support residents and combat the COVID-19 outbreak:

- Rep. Gordon scheduled a virtual office hours session for Thursday, March 26, at 2 p.m. To join the call, dial 617-570-0800 and enter the conference ID number (810) followed by #. Then enter the participant passcode (810326) followed by #. Any Burlington, Bedford, or Wilmington resident is encouraged to join the call. If you are unable to join the call but would like to contact the Representative, please send an email to Kenneth.Gordon@mahouse.gov, or leave a message at 617-722-2575;
- Rep. Gordon worked directly with Bedford Research Foundation clinical laboratory and State public health officials to enable the laboratory to begin accepting assignments from the Commonwealth for testing for COVID-19. The test will supplement the State's efforts to ramp up testing capacity and turnaround times. More information on Bedford Research Foundation's contributions will follow;
- Rep. Gordon filed legislation this week to support local restaurants that have been closed for seated service, and who must confront a lack of diners due to the current emergency. If passed by the Legislature and signed into law, restaurants could sell their current stock of alcoholic beverages with a takeout order with certain limitations during the state of emergency. Governor Baker filed similar legislation, as did a member of the Senate; and
- Rep. Gordon also wrote to the Massachusetts Secretary of Administration & Finance to urge the Department of Revenue to extend the Massachusetts tax-filing deadline to July 15, in line with the revised IRS deadline to give residents dealing with COVID-19 relief during the COVID-19 outbreak.

Other updates that have not been previously posted include:

- Massachusetts residents can now receive updates on COVID-19 by calling 2-1-1 or texting “COVIDMA” to 888-777;
- The number of positive cases in Massachusetts rose by 679 today, totaling 1,838. In all, 19,794 patients have been tested so far. Four patients in their 70s and 80s have died of the virus today;
- The RMV has implemented an online reservation system for certain necessary and required in-person transactions at its 8 open Service Centers. Residents can make a reservation [here](#); and
- The Wilmington RMV Service Center will remain open for walk-in commercial transactions only, including commercial driver’s licenses (CDLs) and permits (CLPs)

As always, Rep. Gordon urges all residents to wash your hands often, stay inside when possible, respect distancing from each other. And please be patient. We will get through this crisis if we work together.

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