

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

April 17, 2020

President Donald J. Trump
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Trump:

We thank you for approving the Commonwealth of Massachusetts's request for a major disaster declaration due to the ongoing coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic¹. The response to the pandemic is unlike anything the Commonwealth or our nation has experienced in modern times. In Massachusetts, there are almost 30,000 confirmed cases of COVID-19 and over 1,200 individuals have died. While the recently granted major disaster declaration will provide critical resources for Massachusetts state agencies, municipalities, and nonprofit organizations, the need for additional resources to combat this crisis grows with each passing day. Personal protective equipment, in particular, is desperately needed by frontline medical workers and other essential employees. Furthermore, the growing public health costs and accelerating economic collapse caused by the COVID-19 pandemic will undoubtedly result in dramatic shortfalls to state and municipal revenues. Given the impending state and local budget crises, we ask you to direct the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to waive the all of the traditional cost-share requirements for major disaster assistance.

The federal government has waived these matching costs during other national emergencies, including the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks.² Additionally, recent studies projected a "dramatic collapse" in revenue for Massachusetts, estimating a tax revenue shortfall of \$1.8 billion to \$3 billion over the next 15 months.³ The analysis also added that this current crisis differs greatly from other economic events due to the precipitous pace of decline and predicted "shortfalls ranging from \$540 million to \$753 million in fiscal 2020, and from \$1.2 billion to \$2.6 billion in fiscal 2021."⁴

¹ Boston CBS, Trump Approves Major Disaster Declaration In Massachusetts For Coronavirus, March 28, 2020 <https://boston.cbslocal.com/2020/03/28/coronavirus-president-trump-approves-major-disaster-declaration-massachusetts-covid-19/>

² Congressional Research Service, "FEMA Disaster Cost-Shares: Evolution and Analysis," Jared Broan and Bruce Lindsay, April 4, 2013, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/homsec/R41101.pdf>.

³ WBUR, "Projected Tax Revenue Shortfall In Mass. Sets Up Tough Budget Math, Tufts Researchers Say," Katie Lannan, March 31, 2020, <https://www.wbur.org/bostonmix/2020/03/31/dramatic-revenue-drop-billions-coronavirus>.

⁴ *Id.*

The economic effects of COVID-19 will be felt long after we control the spread of the pandemic. Unemployment is dramatically rising in the Commonwealth and across the country⁵, and with the dire state revenue forecasts on the horizon, Massachusetts and other states will need FEMA to increase the federal cost-share to one hundred percent for emergency work including Direct Federal Assistance. FEMA has the authority to grant this request under 44 CFR§ 206.47(d) “if warranted by the needs of the disaster.”⁶ The scope and costs of the COVID-19 disaster is unparalleled and our state desperately needs more federal assistance.

Waiving the federal cost share will allow Massachusetts to continue to devote precious resources towards our health care infrastructure. Furthermore, the Commonwealth is moving toward a 10-day window where Governor Charlie Baker, at the advice of public health experts, estimates the number COVID-19 patients and related hospitalizations to surge and the latest modeling projects around 2,500 new confirmed cases a day by late April.⁷ Massachusetts and other states need more assistance from the federal government and simply do not have the resources or capacity to implement a cost-share.

On behalf of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and its residents, we respectfully urge you to direct FEMA to increase the federal cost-share to one hundred percent and waive all applicable cost-sharing requirements related to the COVID-19 pandemic disaster. Thank you in advance for your attention to this matter and your prompt consideration. We look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator

Edward J. Markey
United States Senator

Richard E. Neal
Member of Congress

James P. McGovern
Member of Congress

⁵ Masslive.com, “Coronavirus: 103,000 new unemployment claims in Massachusetts bring four-week total over a half million” Updated Apr 16, 10:16 AM; Posted Apr 16, 8:38 AM By Jim Kinney <https://www.masslive.com/news/2020/04/coronavirus-103000-new-unemployment-claims-in-massachusetts-bring-four-week-total-over-a-half-million.html>

⁶ Federal Emergency Management Agency, Federal Register Notice, “Disaster Assistance; Cost-share Adjustment,” April 21, 1999, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-1999-04-21/pdf/99-9934.pdf>.

⁷ State House News Service: “Baker: Surge Could Come April 20; Flow Of Cases May Require State To Tweak Plan” Colin A. Young April 10, 2020 <https://www.wbur.org/commonhealth/2020/04/10/baker-massachusetts-covid-19-coronavirus-response-mask-adjustments>

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