



## **Rewriting the Massachusetts Economy: A Three-part Worker Agenda to Protect Human Life**

### *Executive Summary*

*Amidst the ongoing crisis, our state must forge a new social contract that puts the health and safety of workers at the center of public policy.*

The COVID-19 crisis has cast a new light on the value of the labor furnished by workers who previously have gone “unseen” for too long within our society, and who are now, at long last, being broadly recognized as essential. These same workers have been chronically underpaid and undervalued by large corporations that have always been more concerned with their bottom line than with the common good.

Furthermore, the pandemic has exposed that for the vast majority of Massachusetts residents, our economy is broken. Our state lacks the basic mechanisms to take care of the most fundamental human needs such as food, housing and health for those who work and for those who are unable to work.

Now, Massachusetts has an opportunity to rewrite our economy. We cannot just reopen our state and allow CEOs and their corporations to go unregulated. The crisis has shown us that it is our labor that drives the economy and creates prosperity. And it is workers—not CEOs—who are out there risking our lives on a daily basis during this pandemic. Therefore, we must prioritize what workers need, not what large corporations want.

It is time to create a new social contract in Massachusetts that is constructed first and foremost to protect human life.

### **PART I: Safety and Science**

To protect human life, the Commonwealth's immediate policies and new social contract must be driven by safety and science in all governance decisions regarding the resumption of labor and commerce.

- Testing
- Lower infections
- Contact Tracing
- Data and Reporting

### **PART II: Strong and Enforceable Standards**

To protect human life, the Commonwealth's immediate policies and new social contract must include stronger labor safety standards than ever before -- standards that corporations will be required by law to uphold.

- Regulate Corporations to Keep Workers Safe
- Pass an Essential Workers Bill of Rights

### **PART III: Invest in our Recovery**

To protect human life, the Commonwealth's immediate policies and new social contract must invest in our collective recovery in new ways that cure historic and exacerbated inequities.

- Leave No Worker Behind
- Secure Housing for All
- Build Sustainable Public Infrastructure

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## **Rewriting the Massachusetts Economy:**

### **A Three-part Worker Agenda to Protect Human Life**

The world we once knew has been shaken by the COVID-19 crisis, and workers cannot just return to the same desks, workbenches and classrooms in the same ways that we left them in March. Safety and saving lives must be the first priorities as our Commonwealth considers how to begin the resumption of additional labor, civic life, and additional commerce. Science, data, public health, saving lives, and the expertise of frontline workers must be the forces that drive any statewide actions that seek to increase commerce.

The Greater Boston Labor Council is calling for any reopening to include a range of key investments, regulations, and reforms that will address immediate concerns for worker and public safety. The Council is calling for ongoing and increased public investment throughout this recovery and beyond.

## **PART I**

### **SAFETY AND SCIENCE**

#### **Trust our Health and Safety Experts**

The working people of Massachusetts must not be part of a blind experiment. Before we can reopen businesses and return to work, we must have the scientific evidence that shows we can proceed safely. Only through the application of these scientific metrics can we maximize worker and public safety:

- **Testing:** Massachusetts must lead the nation in state-wide testing, performing enough tests to meet the WHO guideline that 10% or fewer tests come back positive.

- **Lower infections:** We must proceed with caution, waiting for at least two weeks of consecutive new infection rate decreases before the state begins to ease restrictions.
- **Contact tracing:** Massachusetts needs abundant resources for proper contact tracing so that we can identify every person that might have come into contact with an infected individual. With staggering unemployment, we have the workforce available to form a team of contact tracers that would be unprecedented in its scope and capacity.
- **Data and Reporting:** Massachusetts needs to gather, report and analyze data on the occupation and industry of Covid-19 patients in order to address racial disparities in testing and treatment of COVID-19 and the unique needs of people with disabilities, people experiencing homelessness, and other vulnerable communities.

## **PART II**

### **SETTING STANDARDS**

#### **Regulate Employers to Keep Workers Safe**

People will become sick and die as they reenter the workforce and we must lead with the goal of valuing every life and minimizing infection and death, above all else. There is no dollar earned worth more than a human life.

The state must develop and implement an infection control plan, conduct worksite inspections to enforce existing standards and the infectious disease standard, while issuing clear enforcement directives to ensure that employers are protecting workers in every sector.

#### Massachusetts Employers must be responsible for:

- **Providing PPE** for all their workers that meets the highest industry standards according to the guidelines established by health and safety experts. Additionally, anyone entering a workplace must be required to wear facemasks to protect themselves and workers.

- ***Cleaning and sanitizing*** all offices and work areas frequently, and ensuring hand sanitizer and washing stations are readily available and accessible to all workers.
- ***Developing safety plans*** and written procedures for any confirmed COVID-19 cases at the workplace, including guidance for isolation of individuals in contact with infected workers supplied to all personnel in the language they are most comfortable with.
- ***Reconfiguring work areas and schedules*** to maintain safe physical distancing. Employers should encourage workers to continue teleworking when possible, which will help reduce impacts on our transit systems and allow for greater enforcement of physical distancing at work and in public spaces.

### **Pass an Essential Workers Bill of Rights**

While Congress debates the passage of a national [Essential Workers' Bill of Rights](#), unions have acted decisively to support their members through collective bargaining and to [push for bold legislation to expand these protections](#) to all public and private sector workers. The Greater Boston Labor Council calls on Governor Baker to immediately pass legislation that will mandate:

- Protections for workers who speak up to their employer, public entities, and on social media or in the press about unsafe working conditions. Workers must not be retaliated against and must have the basic right to refuse to work if they fear exposure to the virus;
- Expanded protections to defend workers' rights to organize and to join unions, and the implementation of new policies that enable unionization across all sectors
- Access to free healthcare and as much paid sick time as needed should they or their families become infected with COVID-19; and
- Additional compensation for the dangerous and critical work they are performing for the public, and a presumption that if they contract COVID-19, they did so in the line of duty so they are covered by workers compensation and paid for on-duty time accordingly.

## **PART III**

### **INVEST IN THE RECOVERY**

#### **Leave No Worker Behind**

Immigrants make up a significant portion of the essential workforce that keeps our society and economy going. Immigrant workers are entitled to the same protection, safety and security as all other workers.

- The state must pass legislation filed in the House and Senate that would provide a state stimulus for workers with an Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN).
- Massachusetts lawmakers must pass the Work and Family Mobility Act so that immigrant workers can obtain a driver's license, get to work safely and contribute to the recovery of our state's economy.

#### **Secure Housing for Every Worker**

We cannot have a secure workforce without housing security. Otherwise, renters and homeowners who have been unable to keep up with the rent and mortgage payments during the state of emergency will be hit with a mountain of unsustainable debt, and the state can expect a tidal wave of evictions and foreclosures as a result. We need emergency legislation that will provide relief to tenants and homeowners while they get back on their feet, with three main priorities to:

- Stop the wave of evictions that we expect after the temporary protections end;
- Pause the obligation to pay rent during a time when tens of thousands of people are unemployed, risking their lives to remain employed, or who are otherwise impacted by the economic shock of the pandemic; and
- Forgive the unsustainable mountain of rental and mortgage debt accrued during the state of emergency.

#### **Build Sustainable Public Infrastructure**

There is no better way to begin rewriting our economy than to increase investments in rebuilding our public infrastructure. Public goods and services are the keystones

of an equitable society, yet as we have seen through this pandemic, too many Massachusetts residents live in areas that have been severely underinvested in. But we can begin to change that and put tens of thousands of people to work in family-sustaining jobs by:

- weatherizing and retrofitting our schools, libraries and housing
- repairing and building out a more comprehensive and affordable transportation system,
- restoring and reclaiming public lands for community gardens, parks and recreation
- revamping and expanding our clean water and energy systems

## **Conclusion**

As stated, the pandemic has exposed that for the vast majority of Massachusetts residents, our economy is broken. We lack the basic mechanisms to take care of fundamental human needs such as food, housing and health for those who work and those unable to work. As we begin investing in our state's recovery, we must fundamentally rewrite the Massachusetts economy in ways that move us away from the many inequities that existed before the pandemic and that have been exacerbated since it began.

Right now, the ultra-rich who have amassed enormous wealth from the labor of workers in Massachusetts pay a smaller share of their income in state and local taxes than any other income group, and many large corporations do not pay taxes at all. Rewriting the Massachusetts economy will eventually mean enacting bold legislation that requires everyone living and doing business in the Commonwealth will be taxed fairly and equitably. As we focus on protecting human life, we must build upon the mutual aid and caring for one another that we are seeing right now, and forge a new social contract that puts the health and safety of workers at the center of public policy.