

# **OPINION: “I am frustrated with New Bedford Schools and after-school program quarantine nonsense”**

*Do your children attend a New Bedford school or after-school program and been quarantined? How was it handled in your opinion? One New Bedford mom shares her disappointment.*

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“Public school (#LincolnElementary) and after school program (#littlepeople’scollege) need to come to an agreement that makes sense for the parents.

Either the quarantine is 5 days for both, or 10 days for both, but they can’t continue with 5 days in one and 10 days on the other as a rule for quarantine. They are literally forcing parents to lie at this point.

Post this anonymous please. I would like to know what people think about this. As a single mother who can’t afford to be off work I am frustrated with this nonsense.”

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## **Massachusetts man sentenced for marijuana and tax**

# offenses

A Boston man was sentenced in federal court in Springfield for marijuana distribution and tax offenses.

Zachary Sweeney, 36, was sentenced by U.S. District Court Judge Mark G. Mastroianni to three months in prison and three years of supervised release. Sweeney was also ordered to pay \$156,457 in restitution. On July 6, 2021, Sweeney pleaded guilty to one count of conspiracy to distribute marijuana, one count of possession with intent to distribute marijuana, one count of filing a false tax return and two counts of failing to file tax returns.

From 2014 to 2017, Sweeney conspired with others to distribute marijuana. On January 10, 2017, a search of Sweeney's residence recovered 1,000 marijuana vape oil pens and over \$90,000 in cash, two gold bars and other luxury items. Sweeney also filed a false income tax return for 2013 by substantially under-reporting his income and failed to file tax returns for tax years 2014 and 2015, despite earning over \$250,000 in each of those years. For tax years 2013 through 2015, Sweeney failed to report over \$625,000 in income and therefore failed to pay over \$150,000 in federal income taxes.

Acting United States Attorney Nathaniel R. Mendell; Deputy Assistant Attorney General David A. Hubbert of the Department of Justice's Tax Division; Joleen D. Simpson, Special Agent in Charge of the Internal Revenue Service's Criminal Investigations in Boston; Matthew B. Millhollin, Special Agent in Charge of Homeland Security Investigations in Boston; and Brian D. Boyle, Special Agent in Charge of the Drug Enforcement Administration, New England Division made the announcement. Assistant U.S. Attorney Alex J. Grant of Mendell's Springfield Branch Office and Trial Attorney Christopher O'Donnell of the Justice Department's Tax Division prosecuted the case.

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# **Dartmouth Police Department clears up story about “shooting at Dartmouth Mall”**

“There is some chatter circulating on the Internet that there was a shooting at the Mall.

Though there was a physical altercation between several males inside of Macy’s, no weapons were ever shown, thus any information reporting that there was a shooting is false, and SHOULD NOT be shared or rebroadcasted in any way!

Moving forward, please consider using trusted sources, such as the police department, for any information pertaining to public safety, as the intent of other sources may be either to simply gain attention, or to spread misinformation in an effort to promote fear mongering.

PLEASE SHARE THIS ACCURATE INFORMATION” -Dartmouth Police Department.

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## **New Bedford’s Mayor Mitchell: “The city is down about 30 plow drivers because of**

# COVID-19”

Did it take too long to have your street plowed? Your neighborhood? Come across streets that had not been plowed?

Well, you can thank the recent COVID-19 surge for that. According to Mayor Jon Mitchell, the city is down about 30 plow drivers because of COVID-19. When New Bedford is hit by a storm like yesterday was the city has approximately 120 plows taking care of the roads.

Of those 30 missing drivers, two were absent because they had not complied with the city’s vaccine mandate put in place in November.

New Bedford is currently experiencing one of the highest 2-week COVID case numbers in Massachusetts and has one of the lowest vaccination rates in the state.

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## **Massachusetts State Police respond to Freetown crash that claims life of New Bedford man**

At approximately 7:30 a.m. on Friday, Troopers assigned to State Police-Dartmouth responded to reports of a single-vehicle crash on Route 140 northbound in the area of mile marker 10 in Freetown.

Upon the arrival of troopers they located a 2008 Toyota Tacoma that left the roadway and crashed into a tree.

Troopers and Paramedics from Freetown EMS located the operator, 45-year-old owner/operator & master barber at Jason's Bridgewater Barbershop, Jason Saccocia of New Bedford, inside of the vehicle.



*Massachusetts State Police photo.*

He was declared deceased at the scene. No other vehicles were involved in the crash and Saccocia was the sole occupant in the vehicle. The weather at the time of the crash was heavy snow and is believed to be a main contributing factor in the crash.

The exact cause and circumstances of the crash remain under investigation by Troop D of the Massachusetts State Police along with the State Police Collision Analysis Reconstruction Section, Crime Scene Services Section, Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, and the State Police Detective Unit assigned to Bristol County. The scene cleared at approximately 11 a.m.

Troopers throughout the state had been responding to numerous minor crashes, spin-outs, and roll-overs. Thankfully no serious injuries from the storm-related crashes. The driver of

a tractor-trailer was Medevaced night following a crash in Marlboro prior to the storm.



*Massachusetts State Police photo.*

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## **New Bedford roadwork sites for the upcoming week of January 10, 2022 – January 14, 2021**

The City of New Bedford has roadwork sites for the upcoming week of January 10, 2022 – January 14, 2021 and they are as follows:

**Eversource will be working on the gas main relays and services**

**at:**

- No work scheduled

**Other:**

- MassDOT Project #608536, intersection improvements at Rockdale Ave X Allen St is wrapped up for the winter season. Contractor (JH Lynch) will be returning in March 2022, weather pending, to resume utility work and intersection upgrades.
- MassDOT Project #606718, roadway reconstruction and related work (including traffic signal installation) along a section of Hathaway Rd, Nauset St and Mt Pleasant St is wrapped up for the winter season. Contractor (KR Rezendes, Inc) will be returning in March 2022, weather pending, to resume final site work.
- MassDOT Project #606709 intersection improvements along a section of Kings Highway and Tarkiln Hill Rd. is wrapped up for the winter season. Contractor (PA Landers) will be returning in March 2022, weather pending, to resume site work.
- Contractor (SCR Constructors) will continue site work at the future South Coast Rail station platform locations in the City. (Church St at Carlisle St and Wamsutta St at Acushnet Ave.) If you have questions, please email the project team at [SouthCoastRail@dot.state.ma.us](mailto:SouthCoastRail@dot.state.ma.us)

**Union St. Phase II Sewer Separation Project:**

- Contractor (C. Naughton Corp.) will begin replacement of the Union St sewer main between Sixth St and County St. Initially, the work will closure of 6th St at the Union St intersection. During working hours, Union St westbound traffic will be detoured via Pleasant St and Elm St. Union St eastbound traffic will be detoured via Seventh St and Spring St. Sixth St southbound traffic will be detoured at Elm St to County St. Thereafter access to, Union St will be limited between County St and Sixth St. Union St westbound traffic will be detoured at Sixth St to School St. Union St eastbound traffic will be detoured at County St to Spring St.
- Access to local business will be maintained,

construction/detour signage will be posted, and police details will be on-site to assist with traffic management.

**\*\* Please note: Contractors will continue to follow guidelines and protocol regarding COVID-19 social distancing while conducting work in construction zone.**

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## **New Bedford snow emergency parking ban lifted**

The citywide snow emergency parking ban is lifted as of 5 p.m. today, Jan. 7.

City officials implemented the parking ban at 10 p.m. Thursday, Jan. 6, as the National Weather Service issued a Winter Storm Warning for the region, including New Bedford.

City offices and public schools were closed Friday, ahead of the storm which dropped several inches of snow on the city and region. The storm's morning arrival affected the Friday morning commute and made travel difficult on slick roads.

The Winter Storm Warning ended at 4 p.m. Friday, as skies cleared. Saturday's forecast is sunny and cold. With the ban lifted, residents are asked to please remove their vehicles from municipal and school parking lots, to ensure these lots can be cleared.

The parking ban is designed to allow City workers to efficiently remove snow from New Bedford roadways, and enable public safety vehicles and residents to travel safely.

To further increase public safety during storm events, some areas are designated for a double-sided parking ban. Streets



with parking prohibited on both sides are selected because they are major routes for ambulances, school buses, and SRTA buses, or have a history of large vehicles being unable to successfully navigate due to street narrowness.

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# **Massachusetts Education Commissioner To Make Mask Mandate Decision Next Week**

By Michael P. Norton  
State House News Service

As COVID-19 case counts continue to rise across Massachusetts, including its schools, a decision about whether to extend the mask mandate in public schools will be announced next week, Education Commissioner Jeff Riley told local school officials.

A Department of Elementary and Secondary Education spokeswoman confirmed Thursday morning that Riley informed school superintendents of his plans during a phone call with them on Wednesday.

In October, Riley notified school districts he was extending the mask requirement in K-12 public schools through Jan. 15, citing consultations with medical experts and state health officials. Education Secretary James Peyser said the extension represented “another big step forward in our efforts to keep schools safe for our kids” and would allow more time for the elementary school students to receive the COVID-19 vaccine.

Education officials say masking, testing and vaccinations have made school environments safe, and Riley had planned last

month to make a call on whether to lift or extend the mask mandate but decided to wait.

“With the new arrival of omicron, it seems too soon to make a decision at this time,” Riley said Dec. 17. “The medical community’s asked for some additional time so that we have better facts on the ground. They’re learning a lot very quickly about the omicron variant. We’ll wait and see, and see what the situation looks like in early January for a decision.”

Since then, COVID-19 case counts and hospitalizations have exploded across Massachusetts. Schools have stayed open for the most part, although districts coming out of the holiday break are seeing more virus-related absences that have sidelined students, teachers and the other support staff necessary to school functions.

In October, when Riley last extended the mask mandate, state education officials reported 1,804 COVID-19 cases among students during the week of Oct. 14 through Oct. 20, and 350 among staff. In the most recent report, covering the week of Dec. 16 through Dec. 22, 8,576 student cases were reported and 1,544 among staff.

The next report on student and staff infections is due out later Thursday.

In the face of rising infections and an updated mask advisory from state public health officials, education officials have stood by their rule that allows the mask mandate to be lifted, at the discretion of local officials, at middle and high schools with 80 percent of their students and staff vaccinated.

According to the most recent data available, state education officials have approved requests to lift the mask mandate from 31 schools, with seven other requests still processing.

The Department of Public Health on Dec. 21 issued an advisory that recommends, but does not require, all residents to wear masks in indoor public spaces. Massachusetts had varying forms of a mask mandate in place for much of the first year during the pandemic. DPH replaced the mandate with an advisory in May, about a month before Baker ended the COVID-19 state of emergency, and Baker has resisted calls to reinstitute a mask mandate.

“In response to the rise in cases and hospitalizations we are seeing in the Commonwealth and as we learn more about the emerging omicron variant, the Department of Public Health advises that all residents, regardless of vaccination status, wear a mask or face covering when indoors and not in their own home,” state Health and Human Service Secretary Marylou Sudders said last month when the advisory was reintroduced. “We particularly urge this recommendation if you have a weakened immune system or if you are at increased risk for severe disease because of your age or an underlying medical condition, or if someone in your household has a weakened immune system, is at increased risk for severe disease, or unvaccinated.”

The mask advisory was issued on the same day that Gov. Charlie Baker announced he was activating hundreds of Massachusetts National Guard personnel to assist overwhelmed health care providers and requiring hospitals to postpone or cancel non-essential elective procedures in order to preserve hospital bed capacity.

The mask advisory immediately generated calls for a mask mandate, and Baker on Dec. 21 defended the advisory in part by saying that people who have been both vaccinated and boosted against COVID-19 face an “extremely low” risk from the fast-spreading omicron variant.

School districts this year are required to provide in-person learning to all students. The school mask mandate includes

exceptions for students who cannot wear a mask due to medical conditions or behavioral needs.

In August, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education gave Riley the authority, at his request, to mandate masks for all public K-12 students, educators, and staff through at least Oct. 1. So far, Riley has twice extended his initial mandate.

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## **Former Member of New Bedford Latin Kings Chapter Sentenced for Drug Trafficking and Manufacturing**

former member of the New Bedford Chapter of the Massachusetts Almighty Latin King and Queen Nation (Latin Kings) was sentenced yesterday on drug charges.

Tanairy Ruiz, a/k/a "Queen Tanairy," 34, was sentenced by U.S. Senior District Court Judge Rya W. Zobel to time served (approx. 30 days) and three years of supervised release. On Sept. 8, 2021, Ruiz pleaded guilty to conspiracy to manufacture, distribute and possess with intent to distribute cocaine and cocaine base.

The Latin Kings are a violent criminal enterprise comprised of thousands of members across the United States. The Latin Kings adhere to a national manifesto, employ an internal judiciary and use a sophisticated system of communication to maintain the hierarchy of the organization. As alleged in court documents, the gang uses drug distribution to generate

revenue, and engages in violence against witnesses and rival gangs to further its influence and to protect its turf.

Ruiz conspired with other Latin Kings members to manufacture and distribute cocaine base throughout the City of New Bedford. Ruiz resided in one of the many “trap houses” or multi-unit apartment buildings in New Bedford that were controlled by the Latin Kings. Ruiz’s apartment was used as a location where cocaine was “cooked” or manufactured into cocaine base.

In December 2019, a federal grand jury returned an indictment alleging racketeering conspiracy, drug conspiracy and firearms charges against 62 leaders, members and associates of the Latin Kings. Ruiz is the 41st defendant to be sentenced in the case.

Acting United States Attorney Nathaniel R. Mendell; Joseph R. Bonavolonta, Special Agent in Charge of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Boston Division; Commissioner Carol Mici of the Massachusetts Department of Correction; and New Bedford Police Chief Joseph C. Cordeiro made the announcement. Valuable assistance was also provided by the FBI North Shore Gang Task Force and the Bristol County and Suffolk County District Attorney’s Offices. Assistant U.S. Attorneys Philip A. Mallard and Lauren Graber of Mendell’s Criminal Division prosecuted the case.

This effort is part of an Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Forces (OCDETF) operation. OCDETF identifies, disrupts, and dismantles the highest-level criminal organizations that threaten the United States using a prosecutor-led, intelligence-driven, multi-agency approach. Additional information about the OCDETF Program can be found at <https://www.justice.gov/OCDETF>.

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# **Scott Kruger Appointed New Bedford Fire Department Chief**

Mayor Jon Mitchell has announced his appointment of Acting Fire Chief Scott Kruger as Fire Chief for the City of New Bedford.

In New Bedford, candidates for fire chief are selected based on performance on a state-administered Civil Service examination and assessment process. Results from the most recent Civil Service exam were recently released, with Kruger the top-scoring candidate. Mayor Mitchell has asked the City Council to confirm Kruger's appointment.

Kruger is a veteran of the New Bedford Fire Department and has 31 years of City service, most recently including his position as Acting Fire Chief since August 2020. In this role, Kruger has led the Fire Department capably through some of the most challenging periods of the pandemic.

Kruger began his service to the City in 1991, as an emergency medical technician with New Bedford Emergency Medical Services. He joined the New Bedford Fire Department two years later and steadily advanced in rank, serving as a firefighter from 1993-2001, as a lieutenant from 2001-06, as captain from 2006-10, as a district chief from 2010-19, and as acting deputy fire chief from February 2019 until he assumed the Acting Chief role in August 2020.

Kruger has received specialized training across a number of fire safety areas in the course of his career, including a degree in fire science technology from Bristol Community College in 2000 and multiple coursework at the National Fire Academy in Emmitsburg, Maryland.

As a licensed EMT-paramedic, Kruger's medical training has also translated into local impact, with Kruger having played an important role, for example, in ensuring that emergency response vehicles in New Bedford are equipped with EpiPens, lifesaving devices that serve people suffering severe allergic reactions, as well as with the drug hydroxocobalamin, in packages known as cyano-kits, which aid in the treatment of severe smoke inhalation.

"Chief Kruger exemplifies what it means to be a professional firefighter. His long record of service to the City of New Bedford speaks for itself," Mayor Mitchell said.

Mitchell added, "The Chief's strong leadership skills and experience have proven invaluable during the most difficult days of the pandemic, as he's worked tirelessly to ensure the health and safety of our residents and the firefighters under his command."