

Senator Warren unveils bill to stop price gouging during COVID-19 Pandemic

Washington, D.C. – United States Senator Elizabeth Warren (D-MA) today introduced the Senate companion to the Price Gouging Prevention Act, legislation that would prohibit price gouging of consumer goods throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and future emergencies. The legislation, which was first introduced in the House of Representatives by Congressmen Joe Neguse (D-CO-02) and Ted Lieu (D-CA-33), is co-sponsored by Senator Kamala D. Harris (D-CA).

“We can’t allow American families – who are already struggling to make ends meet during this public health emergency – to be squeezed even further by companies out to make a quick buck,” said Senator Warren. “This bill would protect consumers now and during any future crisis by setting tougher rules of the road and enhancing enforcement against predatory price gouging – and it needs to be included in Congress’s next relief package.”

“It is unacceptable that Americans across the country have been forced to pay higher prices for basic essentials and supplies in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic,” said Congressman Joe Neguse. “Absent a coordinated Federal response, I fear many preventative products will continue to be out of reach for American consumers, thereby placing their health and their family’s health at risk. I was proud to introduce the Price Gouging Prevention Act in the House last week and am grateful to have Senator Warren’s support on this important issue in the Senate. This legislation will not only protect American consumers throughout the duration of the coronavirus public health emergency, but future national emergencies as well.”

“No one should exploit people who are suffering,” said Senator Harris. “Price gouging on household necessities is shameful and adds unnecessary stress for families that are just trying to get by. During my time as Attorney General, I fought price gouging during wildfires, and I’m proud today to help introduce the Senate version of a bill to make it illegal nationwide.”

“Taking advantage of consumers during a public health emergency is wrong,” said Congressman Ted Lieu. “A lot of large and small businesses are stepping up to produce necessities for our communities and our healthcare workers, but there are still opportunistic merchants trying to make an extra buck on panic. I’m grateful to partner with Rep. Neguse, Sen. Warren and Sen. Harris on the Price Gouging Prevention Act, which will protect consumers from being forced to pay astronomical prices for what are ordinarily affordable basic goods and necessities.”

The outbreak of COVID-19 throughout the United States has led to a surge in demand for-and shortage of-many essential consumer products, including hand sanitizer and cleaning supplies. While several retailers have taken steps to maintain access to these products, there have been numerous reports of merchants, large and small, taking advantage of the current crisis to prey on consumers by charging outrageous prices for what are usually affordable household staples.

The Price Gouging Prevention Act would prohibit such practices during the current public health emergency-as well as future national emergencies-by directing the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) to enforce a ban on any excessive or opportunistic price increases. The legislation provides that any price increase above 10% will be presumed to be price gouging. It also gives the FTC strong authority to enforce the ban, and gives states flexibility to enforce federal law and enact their own laws to crack down on price gouging.

In a New York Times op-ed published on April 8, 2020, Senator Warren urged Congress to focus on cracking down on price gouging in its ongoing effort to address the impact of the coronavirus pandemic. Last month, Senator Warren joined her colleagues in urging the FTC to use its full authority to prevent abusive price gouging on consumer health products during the COVID-19.

Governor Baker Announces COVID-19 Text Alerts Now Available In Spanish

BOSTON – The Baker-Polito Administration today announced that its COVID-19 text message alert system “AlertsMA” is now available in Spanish. This expansion of the text-alert system means that the same text alerts that are distributed via the English-language system will now be available to Spanish-language users.

Users can subscribe to the Spanish-language service by texting COVIDMAESP to 888-777.

“Throughout the COVID-19 outbreak, we have consistently reminded residents to get their information from trusted sources, and with the expansion of the AlertsMA text alert system, we are making it easier for Spanish-speaking residents to access important updates from the Commonwealth,” said Governor Charlie Baker. “This new service builds on our efforts to keep people in all communities across the Commonwealth informed as we confront COVID-19 together.”

Since its launch on March 24, over 215,000 individuals have

signed up to receive text-message updates from AlertsMA.

The Spanish-language text alerts are the latest effort from the Commonwealth to deliver crucial COVID-19 information to non-English speakers. All of Mass.Gov (including Mass.Gov/COVID19) is available in 13 different languages, and the Commonwealth's non-emergency help line, 2-1-1 is available in over 150 languages. Several agencies, including the Department of Public Health and the Department of Unemployment Assistance, offer additional fact sheets available in multiple languages.

"It's crucial that we stay connected with residents throughout our response to this pandemic, and with this expansion of the AlertsMA service, we can better support our Spanish-speaking communities," said Secretary of Health and Human Services Marylou Sudders, the Commonwealth's COVID-19 Command Center Director. "This expansion will help us make sure more residents get crucial guidance from health officials so we can slow and eventually stop the spread of COVID-19."

The Commonwealth's Executive Office of Technology Services and Security partnered with Everbridge, a Massachusetts-based company whose platform powers AlertsMA, to initially bring the notification service online. The Commonwealth and Everbridge partnered with UMass Medical School and the Center for Health Impact for Spanish-language translation services.

"During this public health emergency, it is increasingly important that we leverage technology to enhance our ability to communicate with the residents and businesses of the Commonwealth," said Secretary of Technology Services and Security Curtis M. Wood. "I want to thank our partners at Everbridge, UMass Medical School, and the Center for Health Impact for their collaboration and hard work as we launched this important expansion of the AlertsMA system."

"Working on translations with our team at the Center for

Health Impact to meet the needs of our non-English speaking communities is always important, but critical during emergency situations to keep our communities safe and healthy,” said Lisa Morris, Director Cross Cultural Initiatives at UMMS/Commonwealth Medicine.

The Commonwealth will continue to promote the service on Mass.gov, through digital displays and billboards at the MBTA, via MassDOT, and through social media.

Acushnet Fire Chief statement about positive tests for COVID-19 doubling in one week; violating social distancing

“We saw the sun this week! During this crisis, it is humbling to admit that something so routine as a day full of sunshine matters.

With the warmer weather and, hopefully, sunnier days ahead we need to keep focused on social distancing. At this point, no one needs a lecture about the benefits of staying at least 6 feet apart. It works, it will flatten the curve, it is necessary. To violate that simple request jeopardizes our collective recovery.

“Several members of the Fire and Police Department families are assisting the Council on Aging with the delivery of Meals on Wheels. As could be expected two things have happened; the

request for meals from homebound seniors has increased and the number of volunteer drivers has decreased.

My biggest take away from my interactions – all from a distance – with these Acushnet residents in need is that they are scared, not frightened, but scared. It can be seen in their eyes. They know they are in a high-risk group and are prone to underlying medical conditions. They are often alone at home watching endless news reports of the crisis. Their interactions with family and friends have been cut off. Usually, when we come across this population they are quick to talk and relish the visit. Now they barely look at us through small openings in front doors. It is a reminder of the silent damage this crisis is causing to those we hold dear.

“For every public violation of social distancing, the fear experienced by so many will remain. Increased exposure does nothing to flatten the curve but it does a lot to extend the crisis. Covid-19 is here in Acushnet, plain and simple. Our public safety personnel are treating each call in which we need to get within six feet of a person as a possible exposure. We are taking the necessary precautions because we, like you, don’t know who, knowingly or unknowingly, has the virus. We have transported in our ambulances residents who later tested positive. We know that we took all necessary precautions during our time with them. While still scary, there is a measure of comfort knowing we took appropriate precautions and wore the required PPE.

“We can’t always socially distance ourselves but you can, and you must. Now is not the time to let up. Now is the time to double down for the safety of ourselves, our families, friends, and those neighbors who live day to day with fear in their eyes.

“As of today, we have 11 residents in town who have tested positive for Covid-19. That is more than double the amount since last Friday. All are in our thoughts and prayers and we

continue to wish for their speedy and complete recovery.”

With hope,
Kevin.”

New Bedford reports third COVID-19 related death on Friday

New Bedford Mayor Jon Mitchell’s office reported a third COVID-19 related death in New Bedford today. No further details are being released on the death. 119 positive cases of COVID-19 were also reported Friday morning, up from the **102 cases they reported on Thursday** and up from 81 on Wednesday.

Mayor Mitchell reported **New Bedford’s first two COVID-19 related deaths on Wednesday**.

Dartmouth town officials were notified of their first two COVID-19 related deaths. Full details **here**.

Mayor Jon Mitchell, Southcoast Health President and CEO Keith Hovan, and representatives of Essex Group Management Corporation today announced two Southeastern Massachusetts Regional Care Centers in New Bedford for those recovering from COVID-19. Full details with photos and video **here**.

Fall River has set a high in COVID-19 cases in one day. 17 additional cases of COVID-19 have been identified in Fall River on Thursday. This brings the total in Fall River to 91. Full details **here**.

On April 9, the Massachusetts Public Health Department reported that the state added 2,151 more positive cases of COVID-19 bringing to total to 15,202. This is an increase over Wednesday's 1,588 reported cases. 70 new COVID-19 related deaths were reported since yesterday bringing the total deaths in Massachusetts to 503. Full details [here](#).

A correctional officer and a K9 officer from the Bristol County Sheriff's Office have tested positive for COVID-19. Full details [here](#).

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Town of Dartmouth announces first COVID-19 related deaths

Dartmouth town officials were recently notified of two COVID-19 related deaths. This marks the first two deaths in Dartmouth. Though both of the decedents were listed in High-Risk categories, their names, ages, and genders will not be disclosed out of respect to their individual families.

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Massachusetts State Police to offer "Workout With A Trooper!" through June

Attention parents and guardians and your kids! Looking for a positive (and socially distant) activity for children whose schools are closed?

Want to do some fun with calisthenics based on the bodyweight exercises that Massachusetts State Troopers do?

Want some enjoyable physical activity young people can do at their own pace, in their own homes?

Mark your calendars for Monday, April 13, at 11:30 a.m. and join members of the MSP Academy's Fitness Unit as we kick off Workout With A Trooper! And keep joining us for new workouts every Monday, Wednesday and Friday through the end of June.

We hope to see you there online!

CALLING ALL MASSACHUSETTS STUDENTS

have fun!

stay fit!

WORKOUT WITH A TROOPER

WHEN: MONDAYS, WEDNESDAYS, & FRIDAYS

START TIME: 11:30 AM

WHERE:  PAGE: MA STATE POLICE

**SPONSORED BY: MASSACHUSETTS STATE POLICE
STATE POLICE ASSOCIATION OF MASSACHUSETTS**



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As of 4 pm today, 94,958 people in Massachusetts have been tested for COVID-19 – 7,447 in the past 24 hours, a sharp rise over the previous day's total of 6,167.



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As of April 9, the total amount of cases in The United States is 432,579; with 14,830 total deaths.

Warren, Markey Demand Answers from Zoom on How Company Will Protect Students' Safety and Privacy

United States Senators Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.) and Edward J. Markey (D-Mass.) sent a letter to Zoom Communications Inc. requesting information on how the videoconferencing platform is protecting the safety and privacy of students who use its service. The senators' letter raises concerns about the platform's security and privacy practices and comes as schools across the country rapidly shift to remote education due to the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic.

"The platform is filling a critical need during the pandemic," the senators wrote in their letter. "But precisely because Zoom's technology has become such an invaluable – and in many cases, required – tool for learning and keeping students connected to their school communities during this crisis, we are concerned by recent reports that the platform may not be adequately safeguarding users' data and privacy."

Zoom has seen a rapid increase in users-including teachers and children at more than 90,000 schools who are using the platform to continue instruction-but as its popularity has

grown, concerns about the company's security and privacy practices have emerged. Last month, the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Boston division warned that two high schools in Massachusetts have experienced hijackings of Zoom classes. Public reports have also revealed that Zoom was sharing users' data with Facebook without their knowledge, made misleading claims about whether its services were fully encrypted, and had vulnerabilities that could allow Mac users' cameras and microphones to be accessed by hackers.

While Zoom has committed to an independent security review, these vulnerabilities have led the New York City Department of Education to instruct schools to move away from using Zoom for remote instruction.

In their letter to Zoom Founder and CEO Eric Yuan, Senators Warren and Markey urged him to take all possible actions to protect the security of students' data and prevent these disturbing intrusions, including by publicly releasing an independent, comprehensive review of the platform's cybersecurity and privacy practices, and publicly reporting data on the frequency and nature of Zoom classroom intrusions.

"We appreciate your announced intention to address each of these issues, but it is alarming that Zoom allowed these security breaches to affect millions of users and did not identify or resolve them until they became public," the senators continued.

The senators asked for information on how Zoom is protecting student data as required by the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act and the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act, and requested a response to their inquiry by April 22, 2020.

Massachusetts Announces Initial Implementation Of New Federal Unemployment Benefits From CARES Act

BOSTON – The Baker-Polito Administration today announced details for the initial implementation of federal unemployment benefits in the CARES Act, the federal based COVID-19 relief package. This federal program, enacted on March 27, 2020, will be administered by states. Today's announcement reflects the first set of partial guidance that Massachusetts will immediately implement to support unemployed workers. The Department of Unemployment Assistance (DUA) is moving swiftly to implement the new benefit programs and awaits additional guidance from the federal government for the remainder of benefits authorized by the CARES Act.

Understanding the great urgency of Commonwealth residents to access these benefits, DUA issued new guidance to instruct all residents of what actions they can take now.

Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation (FPUC): For Individuals Currently Collecting Benefits From Regular Unemployment Compensation:

Overview: An additional \$600 per week for individuals collecting benefits from regular unemployment compensation is being implemented by DUA. The additional \$600 will be added to unemployment benefits retroactive to March 29, 2020 and will begin being disbursed to claimants this week.

The FPUC program will provide an additional \$600 per week to individuals who are collecting regular Unemployment Compensation (UC), Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation (PEUC), Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA),

Extended Benefits (EB), Trade Readjustment Act (TRA), and Disaster Unemployment Assistance (DA). The Department has already begun implementing the FPUC program for regular UC claimants. The \$600 will be added to all eligible weeks of benefits retroactive to March 29, 2020 and continuing until July 31, 2020. FPUC monetary disbursements will begin immediately in Massachusetts for those who are currently collecting benefits on regular UC claims. Those receiving PEUC, PUA, and EB will receive the additional \$600 payments retroactive to March 29, 2020 as soon as their claims are processed and determined eligible.

Next Steps For Claimants: Eligible claimants who are already receiving UI do not need to do anything for the additional \$600 to be added to their weekly benefit amount. This benefit will be available for all new claimants filing for regular Unemployment Compensation as well, which can be done at www.mass.gov/unemployment/covid-19

Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA): For Individuals Not Covered Under Traditional Unemployment Insurance (Self-Employed, Gig Economy Workers, Others):

Overview: A benefit will be available for individuals not covered under traditional unemployment insurance like the self-employed or gig workers or those who do not qualify for lack of wages. DUA is now working with a vendor to build a new platform to disburse those benefits. This platform is expected to begin processing claims on or about April 30, 2020.

PUA will provide up to 39 weeks of unemployment benefits to individuals who are not working as a result of COVID-19 and are self-employed, independent contractors, gig economy workers, and others who otherwise would not qualify for regular UC or EB under state or federal law or PEUC. These individuals will not be able to claim benefits directly through the UI Online System in Massachusetts, as of this time. The Department of Unemployment Assistance has engaged a

vendor to build a new platform to disburse PUA benefits. The platform is expected to begin accepting PUA claims by April 30, 2020. Eligible claimants under PUA will be retroactively compensated with this benefit beginning February 2, 2020, or the first week a claimant was unable to work as a result of COVID-19, whichever date is later. The last week this benefit is payable is the week ending December 26, 2020.

Next Steps For Claimants: Eligible claimants should continue to check for updates at www.mass.gov/unemployment/covid-19 on the new platform, which will be ready this month. Once the system is up and running, eligible claimants will receive this benefit backdated to February 2, 2020, or the first week a claimant was unable to work as a result of COVID-19.

Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation (PEUC): For Individuals Who Exhausted

Previous UI Benefits:

Overview: A 13-week extension of benefits for individuals who exhausted their previous benefits – is not yet available as DUA continues to await federal implementation guidance.

The PEUC program provides up to 13 weeks of unemployment insurance benefits to individuals who have exhausted their previous unemployment benefits. The first week a claimant can be compensated on this benefit is the week beginning March 29, 2020, and the last payable week is the week ending December 26, 2020. The Department of Unemployment Assistance is awaiting additional federal guidance on how to implement and administer this program and the extended weeks of PEUC benefits are not yet available.

Next Steps For Claimants: No action at this time. Eligible claimants should continue to check for updates, which will be made available as soon as the state receives information from the federal government.

DUA is committed to moving as quickly as possible to get workers the benefits they deserve during these unprecedented times and will continue to communicate with the public about the status of these benefit programs.