

# Judge plans Massachusetts eviction moratorium ruling “As soon as I can”

Chris Lisinski

State House News Service

Landlords who are unable to remove non-paying tenants due to a statewide moratorium on evictions and foreclosures face “potentially devastating” economic harm, an attorney argued in Suffolk Superior Court Thursday.

A lawyer representing landlords squared off with attorneys for Massachusetts and a range of housing justice groups over whether a judge should step in and lift the temporary ban on removals, which supporters say protects thousands of renters from losing their homes during a global pandemic. Attorney Richard Vetstein contended those claims, arguing that scrapping the moratorium would not lead to a tsunami of evictions and that the policy violates landlords’ constitutional property and court access rights.

“This is literally state reps trying to be housing court judges, and it’s gone too far,” Vetstein, who is representing landlords that claimed they have lost thousands of dollars in unpaid rent from tenants during the state of emergency and have no recourse to reclaim it, said.

State attorney Jennifer Greaney said the Legislature is well within its rights to order stays in court action, stressing that landlords will still have the right to pursue action against tenants once the public health crisis ends.

The moratorium was scheduled to end on Aug. 18, but Gov. Charlie Baker used an option available to him under the new law to trigger an extension until Oct. 17. Through more than

two hours of oral arguments, Suffolk Superior Court Judge Paul Wilson did not indicate how he plans to rule on the case in which plaintiffs are seeking a preliminary injunction. At the end he said he would “issue a decision as soon as I can.”

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## **Massachusetts based Dunkin’ to shutter 800 stores nationwide**

If you are a fan of Dunkin’s your favorite location may be affected by recent news. The quintessential New England coffee destination Dunkin’ announced they will be closing 800 locations – approximately 8% of their stores – throughout the U.S. In addition, the company stated that closures may be extended to 350 locations outside of the country.

Pruning their low-volume sales locations is a decision made by the Quincy-based business and comes in light of their recently released 2nd quarter earnings. Half of the locations will be in Speedway convenience stores.

The COVID-19 pandemic has adversely affected revenue for most businesses around the world and is likely a factor in the decision.

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# UMass to cut 6% of workforce, furlough thousands to close a \$264 million budget gap

Chris Lisinski

State House News Service

The University of Massachusetts system, the third-largest employer in the state, will cut about 6 percent of its full-time equivalent workforce and furlough thousands as part of its efforts to close a \$264 million budget gap ripped open by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Nearly three in 10 UMass employees will be affected by the cost-saving measures, and university officials will also scale back spending on supplies and capital projects.

At a virtual meeting Monday where the Board of Trustees approved a \$3.3 billion fiscal 2021 budget that freezes tuition, President Marty Meehan warned that the four campuses and medical school must overcome an “unprecedented financial challenge.”

“We face difficult decisions today and we will continue to face them in the weeks and months ahead,” Meehan said. “We are coming at this problem from every possible direction.”

UMass officials cut workforce spending by about \$163 million and non-personnel costs by \$92 million to help balance the budget, according to a budget summary provided by a spokesperson.

The system has already laid off 134 of its nearly 24,000 workers and will terminate employment of another 397. About 1,125 student and temporary positions have also been cut, 790 open full-time equivalent jobs will not be filled, and more

than 3,000 employees face furloughs this fiscal year, according to the summary.

About \$243 million in planned long-term capital projects are on hold across the UMass system. Other savings will come from consolidating procurement for the multiple schools and continuing a years-long efficiency effort.

Planning for the upcoming year is made more challenging by uncertainty about federal legislative action and enormous budget strain on state government. In Massachusetts, officials project a revenue shortfall of \$2 billion to \$8 billion below earlier estimates, and state leaders have not fashioned a plan to deal with that.

Other questions linger about the number of students who will remain enrolled once their schools shift to mostly or entirely online classes. UMass campus officials anticipate a decline in enrollment of about 5 percent, but said Monday that number could change as the fall semester approaches.

The fiscal 2021 budget UMass trustees approved Monday, which is about \$171 million less than fiscal year 2020's spending levels, also responds to the outbreak by planning for additional precautions and aiming relief at students and their families.

Campuses will collectively spend about \$30 million more on testing, personal protective equipment, physical distancing preparations, and other precautions against transmission of the highly infectious virus.

Meehan praised UMass for confronting the COVID crisis "better than many."

With Monday's vote, trustees gave their approval to a plan Meehan unveiled in May to freeze tuition for nearly 48,000 in-state undergraduates and 9,500 graduate students across the Amherst, Boston, Dartmouth and Lowell schools.

Officials had increased tuition annually to mirror inflation for the past several years, but it will remain at last year's level for the 2020-2021 academic year. That change means UMass will forego about \$18.6 million in revenue for the system next year.

"Freezing tuition is the right thing to do, but will put additional stress on our budgets," Meehan said.

UMass anticipates its student population will receive almost \$1 billion in financial aid from a combination of federal, state, private and university sources in fiscal year 2021.

The board approved both the fiscal 2021 budget and the tuition freeze unanimously, with trustees Stephen Karam and Julie Ramos Gagliardi abstaining from the student fees question.

UMass labor representatives flagged concerns with the plans during Monday's call, urging campus leaders to embrace more defined plans for providing personal protective equipment and cleaning and to seek alternate ways to balance the budget rather than imposing cuts.

Annetta Argyres, who directs UMass Boston's Labor Extension Program and is the president of the Professional Staff Union for the Boston and Amherst campuses, told the board her 2,000-member union is "very concerned" about the positions that will be lost, arguing that online learning requires more teaching and support staff than in-person instruction.

"This is not the time to eliminate jobs in public higher education, but jobs are being eliminated across our campuses," Argyres said. "The reason we're being given is you are requiring balanced budgets without the use of reserves. Why? What are you trying to protect? Our system has reserves that should be used to stabilize our campuses during crises, and we all know we're in the midst of two crises right now: COVID and the economic collapse."

“This is the time to use those funds to ensure that our institutions weather that storm,” Argyres continued.

Asked about potential use of reserves as Argyres suggested, a Meehan spokesperson replied, “We believe this will be a multi-year challenge we’re facing, and we want to be as flexible as possible.” The spokesperson did not indicate how much the system has in reserves.

Budget-writers anticipate \$15 million in additional revenue, including \$9 million from the federal CARES Act, but did not include in their plan any additional federal relief that may arrive after congressional talks.

Meehan, a former congressman, said he is working with other university presidents and with members of Congress to push for additional action. He said the so-called HEROES Act, a \$3 trillion package the U.S. House approved in May, could bring \$119 million in for the UMass system.

Rather than a system-wide approach, officials at each of the undergraduate campuses in Amherst, Boston, Dartmouth and Lowell are planning their own models for the fall with varying degrees of in-person instruction.

At Amherst, all students who return to campus will be asked to sign an agreement on “responsible behavior” to maintain public health, such as wearing face coverings in public spaces and keeping shared areas clean.

“They’re all required to sign an agreement and we’ll have a huge amount of educational and reinforcement opportunities,” Chancellor Kumble Subbaswamy said at Monday’s meeting.

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# Mayor Jon Mitchell presents New Bedford Fiscal Year 2021 budget proposal

Mayor Jon Mitchell presented his Fiscal Year 2021 City Budget before the New Bedford City Council on Wednesday, July 15, 2020, via virtual meeting due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

In his accompanying letter to the Council presenting the \$365 million general fund budget, Mayor Mitchell wrote:

“The situation facing New Bedford is unlike anything we have experienced before. Ordinarily, my proposed budget comes to you in May for the City Council’s consideration and adoption before the beginning of the new fiscal year on July 1. The arrival of a worldwide pandemic, however, has resulted in widespread illness and death, and has plunged the United States into a severe recession.

“New Bedford has responded skillfully to this crisis. Given our city’s older-than-average population, the pervasiveness of underlying health conditions, and our industrial workforce, we have managed to navigate the first wave of the pandemic better than anyone could have predicted. I am grateful for the City Council’s active support over the last several months and for standing behind the City’s residents, who have responsibly and admirably adjusted their daily lives.

“Nevertheless, the COVID-19 pandemic has inflicted tremendous loss and hardship here. Over one hundred New Bedford residents have died from the virus, more than 2,000 have tested positive, and hundreds of our residents have fallen ill. As of May 2020, the City’s unemployment rate stood at 23.9%, up from about 5% before the onset of the pandemic, the volume of home sales was down by 11.9% in comparison with 2019, and local

revenue had declined substantially. Behind these numbers are our fellow residents who have suffered the loss of jobs or even family members. There is also considerable uncertainty about the future. While the city has begun cautious movement toward allowing businesses and other activities to reopen, the pandemic rages elsewhere and it will assuredly affect our daily lives in the years to come.”

### **Major Uncertainties in FY 2021 Demand a Conservative Approach and Proactive Steps**

Mayor Mitchell noted that New Bedford weathered the last quarter of Fiscal Year 2020 despite the precipitous declines in revenue, helped in part by the City’s conservative approach to budgeting and proactive steps including the freeze on hiring and discretionary expenses imposed at the start of the pandemic. However, Mayor Mitchell noticed that there is considerable uncertainty that has made development of the proposed budget especially difficult, and that the budget could be adjusted if the updated state budget, when produced, differs substantially from the estimates in the proposed budget.

He outlined several major uncertainties.

**State Aid:** State aid constitutes more than 50% of general fund revenue, and the Commonwealth has not provided updated guidance regarding FY 2021’s outlook. Some outside groups, including the Massachusetts Taxpayers’ Foundation, are projecting shortfalls of as much as \$6 billion, leading to significant uncertainty. The FY 2021 budget assumes education aid will not change from FY 2020, despite the passage of the Student Opportunity Act.

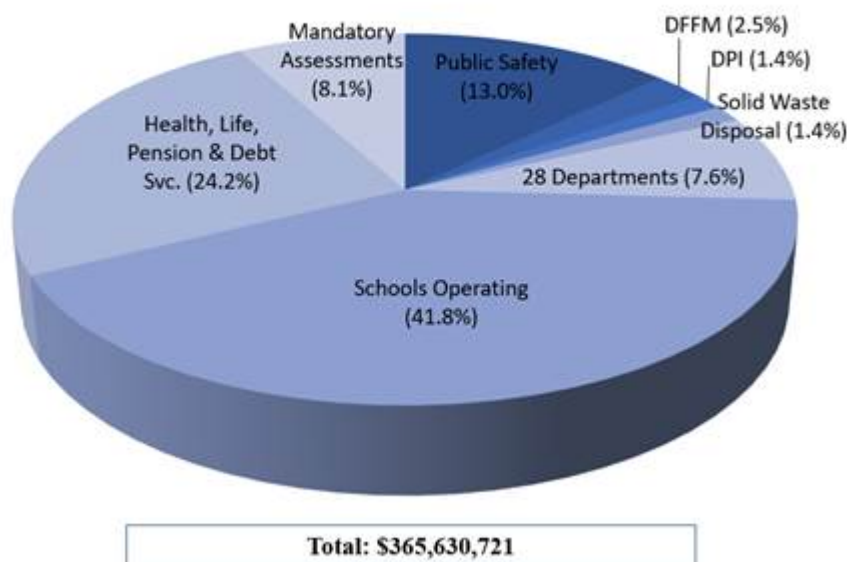
**Local Revenue:** Revenue collection is down across the board, and even with curtailed spending, the City anticipates net shortfalls in several major funds. As a result, significant realignment of the budget is necessary in FY 2021.



Mandated Costs: The City anticipates a significant increase in mandated costs for education, and that the potential funding established by the Student Opportunity Act is no longer likely. In addition, employee benefit costs, including pensions, will increase. Nearly \$1.7 million will be added to the City's pension assessment.

As in past years, Mayor Mitchell noted that there are very few places to cut or restructure the City's budget, with approximately three quarters of the general fund budget predetermined by state mandates and regional agreements.

### **FY 2021 General Fund Appropriations**



The FY 2021 budget proposes significant belt-tightening measures, designed to control spending without diminishing services in City government. Specifically, the budget seeks to avoid both layoffs of City employees as well as a change in the level of service provided to City residents. The budget utilizes a combination of the City's certified Free Cash fund, as well as a \$2 million transfer from the Stabilization Fund, to mitigate the impact of the current economic disruption at this challenging time.

New Efficiencies Coming to City Government to Avoid Layoffs

## and Maintain Effective Services

Several initiatives to streamline City government and create efficiencies without losing services are proposed in the FY 2021 budget:

- Desk officer positions will be eliminated in the Police Department. The staff will not be laid off but reassigned to the field to provide more effective public safety services to the City's residents.
- The downtown police district station will be consolidated and relocated to police headquarters in the City's West End and the savings will be invested in other important police department needs, as recommended by the strategic review recently completed for the police department. The use of police district stations is an outdated model, and among cities in Massachusetts surveyed by our police department, only cities operate more than one police district, or satellite, station around the clock – New Bedford and Boston. (Currently, the downtown district station serves the downtown and West End of the City, and headquarters is located nearby in the West End but does not serve as a local police station. The existence of both a local police district station and headquarters within that district station's district is unnecessarily duplicative and inefficient. Under the budget proposal, the local district station will be co-located with the headquarters on Rockdale Avenue.) A portion of the savings from the police department's efficiency and consolidation proposal will be used for important investments in the Police Department including the necessary replacement of aged police vehicles and enhanced staff training.
- Due to a recent streamlining of dispatch protocols that has reduced the Fire Department's need to respond to medical calls rather than fire-related calls, Engine 8 will be decommissioned, and ten vacant firefighter positions eliminated. This will not result in the closure of a station.

A portion of the savings will be used to assess the future configuration of fire stations in the North End of New Bedford, as was completed for the South End. There will also be added capacity in the Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Department to effectively respond to medical calls through EMS.

- Three full-time and one part-time position in the City's business offices will be reallocated to fund centralization of certain payroll and accounts payable functions, which will lead to further streamlining throughout city government by removing redundant activity from the 32 operating departments.
- The Ashley Park Senior Center will close to further efficiency to the Council on Aging, with consolidation of senior programs at the Buttonwood Senior Center and Rosemary S. Tierney Community Center at Hazelwood Park.
- The New Bedford Public Schools budget has been adjusted to reflect the impact of reduced state aid.
- The Buttonwood Park Zoo privatization initiative will be advanced to reduce the growth in long-term legacy costs, such as retirement and health insurance.
- The hiring freeze will continue as the City awaits further guidance from the state and responds to current conditions.

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## **St. Anne's Lends \$2.75 Million to Local Entrepreneur**

# through the FHLB Jobs for New England Program

St. Anne's Credit Union, a single source for financial services, financing options and resources for individuals and businesses, announced that they have assisted Stephen Silverstein, owner of The Black Whale, co-owner of Cisco New Bedford, founder of Not Your Average Joe's and owner of Joe's Original in Dartmouth, in obtaining \$2.75 million in below market-rate financing through the Federal Home Loan Bank of Boston's (FHLBank Boston) Jobs for New England program. The loan will assist Silverstein in improving, diversifying and stabilizing the economy of New Bedford while creating and preserving jobs through his business efforts. Cisco New Bedford is expected to open in April of 2021.



Cisco Kitchen + Bar Rendering by Accentric.

The \$2.75 million secured by St. Anne's on behalf of Silverstein comes as interest rate reducing financing and will lock in an unprecedented rate of 2.42% for several years. Stephen Silverstein stated, "St. Anne's is the best banking advocate of my businesses, truly an incomparable financial

partner. I was not aware of this program when the commercial lending team at St. Anne's contacted me in regards to this incredible opportunity and took care of everything for me. As a 5th generation entrepreneur, I've been around the business industry since I was born – and this is by far the best interest rate I've ever had in my life. I always trust that St. Anne's has my best interest in mind and this latest effort solidified this notion even further as these incremental savings are crucial to launching and sustaining my projects."

In addition to the \$5 million that St. Anne's has committed to lend Silverstein to assist him in funding his three restaurants in the New Bedford area, this financing obtained by the Credit Union will allow Silverstein to see a savings of over \$75,000 over the life of the loan as well as create 25 new jobs for the New Bedford community.

"Federal Home Loan Bank of Boston's Jobs for New England program was created to provide members like St. Anne's Credit Union with the low-cost financing they need to offer below market-rate small business loans to their members. Since the program was launched in 2016, participating members have provided attractively-priced business loans to a wide variety of small businesses, which in turn have helped to preserve or create thousands of jobs. We are pleased to support St. Anne's as they've funded this important economic development initiative," said Ken Willis, senior vice president, director of housing and community investment at FHLBank Boston.

"To ease uncertainty during the coronavirus pandemic, we are proud to work with our members and businesses through initiatives like deferring loan payments, our COVID-19 Assistance Loan, Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) and the FHLBank Boston Jobs for New England program to offer below market-rate financing. With all of our assistance efforts, we have been able to grant our members and their businesses over \$21 million in loans, which for many, has been a saving grace," said Peter Panaggio, St. Anne's Credit Union's Senior

Vice President and Chief Financial Officer. “St. Anne’s is proud to support our members by providing funding that will truly make a difference in the communities we serve in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic – and this latest loan is an example of our deep commitment to the SouthCoast, as it will assist Stephen Silverstein in stimulating the local economy.”

To learn more about how St. Anne’s can help your business thrive, visit the Credit Union’s dedicated lending office at 585 State Road in Dartmouth or call 508.730.LOAN.

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## **Reopening Massachusetts: Governor Baker initiates transition to Phase 3**

The Baker-Polito Administration today announced that on July 6th, Phase III of the Commonwealth’s reopening plan will begin and updates on gatherings will be in effect. For the City of Boston, Phase III and the gatherings order will take effect on Monday, July 13th.

The Department of Public Health (DPH) also issued updated guidance to mitigate the spread of COVID-19.

Step One of Phase III:

On May 18, the administration released a four-phased plan to reopen the economy based on public health data, spending at least three weeks in each phase. Key public health data, such as new cases and hospitalizations, have been closely monitored and has seen a decline allowing for Phase III to begin on July 6th. Phase III will begin on July 13th in Boston.

The public health dashboard designating the progress of key COVID-19 data metrics has been updated to reflect the number of COVID-19 patients in Massachusetts hospitals to green, indicating a positive trend.

Since mid-April, the 7-day average for the positive COVID-19 test rate is down 94 percent, the 3-day average of hospitalized patients is down 79 percent and the number of hospitals in surge is down 86 percent.

More than 1,000,000 total COVID-19 tests have been administered, and testing continues throughout the state.

The following businesses will be eligible to reopen in Step One of Phase III, subject to industry-specific rules concerning capacity and operations:

- Movie theaters and outdoor performance venues;
- Museums, cultural and historical sites;
- Fitness centers and health clubs;
- Certain indoor recreational activities with low potential for contact;
- Professional sports teams, under the authority of league-wide rules, may hold games without spectators

Full guidance and list of businesses eligible to reopen in Step One of Phase III can be found at [www.mass.gov/reopening](http://www.mass.gov/reopening). Businesses and sectors set to begin opening in Phase III are subject to compliance with all mandatory safety standards.

### **Revised Gatherings Order:**

Under the updated gatherings order, indoor gatherings are limited to eight people per 1,000 square feet, but should not exceed 25 people in a single enclosed, indoor space.

Outdoor gatherings in enclosed spaces are limited to 25 percent of the facility's maximum permitted occupancy, with a maximum of 100 people in a single enclosed outdoor space. This

includes community events, civic events, sporting events, concerts, conventions and more. This order does not apply to outdoor, unenclosed gatherings if proper social distancing measures are possible.

This revised order does not supersede previously issued sector guidance, and is effective beginning Monday, July 6. It will be effective Monday, July 13 in the City of Boston.

### **Public Health Guidance:**

In Phase III, health care providers may continue to provide in-person procedures and services as allowed in Phase II, with the addition of certain group treatment programs and day programs. These programs include adult day health, day habilitation programs, and substance abuse services day treatment and outpatient services. Certain human services programs can reopen including community based day services for adults with intellectual and cognitive disabilities and psychosocial rehabilitation clubhouses.

Health care providers are subject to compliance with all mandatory safety standards, and must continue to utilize prioritization policies established in Phase II for care delivery and scheduling, as well as monitor patient volume for non-essential, elective procedures and services.

In Phase III, visitation guidelines have been updated for 24/7 congregate care facilities and programs overseen by the Executive Office of Health and Human Services, including the Departments of Developmental Services, Youth Services, Children and Families, Public Health, Mental Health and the Mass Rehabilitation Commission. Offsite visits, including overnight visits, will be allowed, under specific guidelines. Other updated guidelines, including visitation for long term care facilities, will be released later today. Complete visitation guidance is available at [www.mass.gov/hhs/reopening](http://www.mass.gov/hhs/reopening).



MassHealth will also extend its current telehealth flexibility through at least the end of the year to ensure member access to critical health care services and encourage continued adherence to preventative public health precautions.

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## **NOAA delays at-sea monitors for a month**

Chris Lisinski

State House News Service

After facing significant pushback from elected officials, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration abruptly reversed course Tuesday and announced it will not resume sending observers out to sea on fishing vessels until at least August.

NOAA had been planning to revive at-sea monitoring in the Northeast on Wednesday after more than three months of suspending the practice, describing it as a key function to track fishery health. Late Tuesday afternoon, however, the agency said the evolving course of the pandemic “required us to re-evaluate and adapt to changing circumstances.”

A waiver exempting fishing vessels from their requirement to carry human observers or at-sea monitors will now remain in place through July 31, during which NOAA plans to conduct outreach with industry leaders and flesh out safety practices it will deploy when monitoring does return.

“As has been done throughout the rest of the country, it is the intent of NOAA Fisheries to begin redeploying observers as soon as it is safe and appropriate to do so,” NOAA wrote in a

press release. "While we intend to begin redeploying observers on August 1, we recognize that this public health crisis continues to evolve and changing conditions may warrant re-evaluating these plans."

Massachusetts officials and commercial fishing representatives had been pushing NOAA for weeks to walk back its plans to start monitoring back up on Wednesday.

Earlier Tuesday – before NOAA changed its plans – both Gov. Charlie Baker and Congressman Seth Moulton warned that the July 1 target created unnecessary risks for fishing workers and for the observers themselves.

In a letter to the National Marine Fisheries Service he penned "on behalf of the Commonwealth's commercial fishing industry," Baker urged NOAA to reconsider. Minimizing contact between crews and outsiders is a critical strategy to minimize COVID exposure, Baker said.

"NOAA's decision to not extend the waiver and require commercial fishermen to accommodate observers effective July 1 is premature given the ongoing state of the pandemic," Baker wrote. "This decision will increase the risk to fishery participants, their families, and communities; create anxiety among all involved; and may motivate further fishermen to cease their operations due to personal concerns."

Moulton has been pushing for weeks for the agency to extend its waiver of observation. One day before the change was set to take effect, he convened a morning press conference to launch a more public case.

"You're going to see people, many of whom are in at-risk groups for COVID-19, have to choose between complying with the law and risking their lives, complying with the law or keeping themselves and their crews safe," Moulton told reporters.

NOAA officials first signaled in late May that, after halting

the mandatory program on March 20, they intended to start it up again on July 1 for northeast fisheries.

Monitoring, they said, plays a key role in conservation and sustainability efforts.

“Observers and at-sea monitors are an essential component of commercial fishing operations and provide critical information that is necessary to keep fisheries open and to provide sustainable seafood to our nation,” NOAA Science and Research Director Jon Hare wrote in a June 22 letter.

At the time, Hare told partner agencies and communities impacted by the decision that monitors would follow several steps aimed at ensuring healthy observation.

Those plans included deploying observers onto the same vessel or same port of origin to limit person-to-person contact, requiring monitors to undergo pre-trip health screening, and instructing them to self-quarantine for 14 days before their first deployment.

Concerns with the original plans also came from the industry, whose leaders argued that they did not have enough of a voice in determining the reopening process and that captains and crews would be forced to accommodate additional risks as the highly infectious virus continues to spread rapidly elsewhere in the country.

Both the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council and the New England Fishery Management Council wrote to NOAA to express concerns in recent weeks, saying that NOAA has not made a clear enough case for why monitoring needs to resume this summer or what impact there would be on fish stocks and catch limits if the tracking remained delayed.

“The Council understands that – under normal circumstances – observer data provide important information for both monitoring the

fishery and assessing fish stocks,” NEFMC Executive Director Thomas Nies wrote in a letter on Friday. “These are not normal times.”

A Democrat representing many communities with significant fishing industries in Massachusetts’s 6th Congressional District, Moulton said he believes an indefinite postponement would be the best option for NOAA, given that many states outside the Northeast are experiencing surges in cases and that public health experts warn about a COVID-19 resurgence in the fall.

But even another month of pausing the program, he said, would give officials time to get a better sense of the risks attached.

“No one is going to look back 10 years from now and say, ‘oh my God, this fish species went extinct because we didn’t have the data from July of 2020,’” Moulton said. “We could well look back a few months from now and say, ‘these fishermen, or even these at sea monitors themselves, would be alive today if we had been prudent about how they’re used.’”

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## **Baker: Unemployment insurance fraud has been “enormously difficult” to fight**

Katie Lannan  
State House News Service

Combating the “thousands and thousands of attempts to steal money from the Unemployment Trust Fund” through fraudulent

claims has been an “enormously difficult issue,” Gov. Charlie Baker said Thursday.

The Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development in late May warned of a “national unemployment fraud scheme” involving the use of stolen personal information to file benefit claims, and said that payments may be delayed as unemployed workers are asked to provide additional identifying information.

“We’re not happy about the fact that we can’t just continue to make the funds available as quickly as we possibly can, but people are working really hard to make sure that people are in fact who they say they are,” Baker said Thursday. “And when you’re dealing with people who are as sophisticated as these people are that can often be complicated, and I wish that we didn’t have to deal with this, but we do.”

Baker said there have been specific cases where people “are calling a variety of places complaining about the fact that they didn’t get their check.” In some cases, he said, those complaints are legitimate, and in others “there’s somebody who’s working on behalf of the fraudsters to try to get funds released that we’ve already determined are, in fact, fraudulent to begin with.”

The state has been putting in mechanisms, recommended by federal officials to double-check, and in some cases triple-check, filers’ identities, Baker said. More than a million initial claims for regular unemployment insurance were filed in Massachusetts from March 15 to June 20, and 624,091 people have filed initial claims for Pandemic Unemployment Assistance since April 20, state labor officials reported Thursday.

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# Coronavirus outbreak costing City of New Bedford \$150,000 a week

According to New Bedford's Chief Financial Officer Ari Sky, the City of New Bedford has incurred \$1.5 million in COVID-19 expenses through June 5, 2020. In his note to City Councilor Linda Morad, he stated the cost has risen to \$150,000 a week and expects the costs to be around \$2 million in total. Sky also expects most of the expenses to be reimbursed by FEMA and the CARES Act.

The largest expenses were \$225,000 for 95,000 fabric masks purchased from Joseph Abboud as part of the **MaskNB program** and the purchase of 56 Dell Computers at 56,962.80.

Here is the letter to Councilor Morad and a detailed breakdown of expenses:

06.25.2020\_COMMUNICATION-EMAIL\_-\_CURRENT\_COVID19\_EXPENSES

06.25.2020\_COVID-19\_EXPENSES\_SPREADSHEET

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# Massachusetts teachers union says 2,000 educators received layoff notices

Michael P. Norton  
State House News Service

In 47 school districts where staff are represented by the Massachusetts Teachers Association, layoff and non-renewal notices were sent recently to more than 2,000 teachers and education support professionals, the union announced Tuesday.

The list of 2,030 notices only includes districts where local union officials reported that 10 or more educators received notices that haven't been rescinded. The union said some notices are issued annually due to enrollment and program changes, but there's a "spike" this year due to government funding issues.

State officials, in the face of historic revenue declines associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, are continuing fiscal 2020 local aid levels through July and August but have not made decisions about full fiscal 2021 local aid levels, which supplement property taxes to form the basis of K-12 education budgets.

Fiscal 2021 is supposed to be the start of a seven-year infusion of new state aid to school districts, but the funding landscape, like so many other things, is uncertain. Lawmakers continue to size up budget plans and options that could involve tax increases, reforms and spending cuts, reserves and federal aid.

House rules call for the House Ways and Means Committee to offer a full fiscal 2021 budget proposal sometime in the next seven days, by July 1.

Preliminary guidance from state education officials calls for schools to significantly reduce class sizes to enable social distancing, according to the MTA, which says that smaller class sizes would require districts to hire more staff.

"The state must live up to its constitutional obligation to provide the funding needed for schools to operate effectively and safely during the COVID-19 pandemic," MTA President Merrie Najimy said. "Doing so is part of dismantling a system of

institutionalized racism wherein students of color attend schools with significantly less funding. While the education and well-being of all students have been disrupted, our students of color have been harmed the most.”

Najimy called for taxes on “the very wealthy and profitable corporations” to help the state close any funding gaps.

After bungling the wording of a 2018 constitutional amendment raising taxes on the wealthy, supporters of a revised proposal tacking a surtax on household incomes above \$1 million a year hope to put their proposal before voters in 2022.