

# 74% support vote-by-mail in Massachusetts

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State House News Service

Seventy-four percent of Massachusetts residents support conducting upcoming state elections entirely by mail, with 21 percent opposed, according to new poll results.

The Suffolk University/WGBH News/Boston Globe poll results showed vote-by-mail was supported by 84 percent of Democrats and 82 percent of independents, but only 14 percent of Republicans. The survey, involving 500 respondents and conducted April 29–May 2, also measured public opinion on leadership and decision-making during the COVID-19 crisis and the pandemic's impacts on income.

Gov. Charlie Baker's decision to extend his nonessential business closure order and stay-at-home advisory for Massachusetts from May 4 to May 18 was supported by 85 percent of respondents, the same number that supported his handling of the crisis.

Sixty-six percent of respondents disapproved of President Trump's handling of the pandemic, and 25 percent approved. Forty-six percent of respondents said the coronavirus has diminished their regular income. The results showed residents feel they are more vigilant about wearing masks than others are, and indicate just 23 percent said they would feel comfortable attending a sporting event, while 18 percent would ride a bus, subway or commuter train. Even if there were a vaccine, nearly one in four still would not attend a sporting event or take public transportation.

"These data can inform politicians, sports team owners and business organizations as they consider how to emerge from the

current restrictions once public health indicators deem it safe,” David Paleologos, director of the Suffolk University Political Research Center in Boston, said in a statement. “The large percentages of people who rule out going to an athletic event or riding public transportation suggest that even as businesses reopen it will not be business as usual.”

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## **SNAP application assistance available through New Bedford's Dept. of Community Services**

New Bedford, Massachusetts— The City of New Bedford's Department of Community Services has partnered with the Department of Transitional Assistance and UMass Medical School to help adult residents in the Greater New Bedford area apply for SNAP, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (formerly known as food stamps) which gives individuals and families money to buy food at grocery stores, convenience stores, and certain farmers markets.

Most households with low or no income are eligible for SNAP, and workers who lost their jobs or work hours due to COVID-19 can apply for SNAP at any time.

Because of COVID-19, you cannot currently apply in person at DTA, but you may apply online at [DTAConnect.com](https://DTAConnect.com). If you do not have access to a computer or need assistance in applying online, you can call the Department of Community Services at 508-961-3020 to schedule a phone appointment with a SNAP outreach worker. Assistance is available in English, Spanish,

and Portuguese.

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## **Federal Judge releases two more immigrant detainees from ICE custody due to COVID-19**

U.S. District Court Judge William G. Young ordered the release of two individuals from ICE's (Immigrant and Customs Enforcement) custody at the Bristol County House of Correction on Tuesday.

ICE has not commented on whether they will enforce their right to monitor the individuals utilizing ankle bracelets.

While some of the 50 released to date were a result of a class-action lawsuit filed by the ACLU, an unknown number were voluntarily released by ICE.

Pre-existing medical conditions place many people at high-risk to the COVID-19 virus and are said to be the root cause for their release. Since by its very nature a jail or prison houses inmates in close quarters these inmates are considered at danger.

The U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency's guidance for detaining immigrants is stated to be on their official website *"...to facilitate a speedy, whole-of-government response in confronting Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19), keeping everyone safe, and helping detect and slow the spread of the virus."*

You can find out more about their policy and protocols when it comes to detaining immigrants [here](#)

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# New Bedford reports one more COVID-19 related death, 60 more cases on Wednesday

New Bedford has seen four new COVID-19 related deaths since Saturday bringing the total to 23.

Mayor Jon Mitchell's office reported 60 additional confirmed COVID-19 cases in New Bedford on Wednesday, bringing the total positive cases in the city to 878, **up from 818 on Tuesday**. One additional COVID-19 related death was also reported today bringing the total to 23 in the city.

15 additional cases of COVID-19 have been identified in Fall River, according to the Mayor's Office. This brings the total in Fall River to 601. Full details **here**.

On May 5, the Massachusetts Public Health Department reported that the state added 1,184 more positive cases of COVID-19 bringing to total to 70,271. This is an increase from Monday's 1,000 reported cases. Full details **here**.

Key indicators about the COVID-19 outbreak in Massachusetts have for the first time moved in an encouraging direction for several days straight, Gov. Charlie Baker said Tuesday, but as other states are opening up economic activity, officials here still want to see at least two weeks of steady progress. Full details **here**.

State tax collections tumbled in April by more than \$2.3 billion compared to last April, another sign of the damage inflicted on the economy and the state's finances by forced business shutdowns aimed at slowing the spread of COVID-19.

Full details [here](#).

A Massachusetts Senate committee will investigate an incident at the Bristol County House of Correction, while Gov. Charlie Baker cautioned against “drawing conclusions” about the violent altercation. Full details [here](#).

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# Massachusetts Senate probing uprising at Bristol County Sheriff ICE facility

Chris Lisinski and Katie Lannan  
State House News Service

A Massachusetts Senate committee will investigate an incident at the Bristol County House of Correction, while Gov. Charlie Baker cautioned against “drawing conclusions” about the violent altercation.

The Senate Post Audit and Oversight Committee plans to examine the incident – which **Bristol County Sheriff Thomas Hodgson alleged was an attack by detainees** and which members of the congressional delegation alleged was violent retaliation by correction officers – that left three detainees hospitalized.

Senate leaders also signaled Tuesday that they want to know why Sen. Sonia Chang-Diaz was not permitted to enter the facility on Saturday despite state law granting lawmakers access.

In a joint statement, Senate President Karen Spilka and Post Audit and Oversight Committee Chair Sen. John Keenan of Quincy

said their chamber is “extremely concerned” about the incident “in which the safety of both staff and detainees was endangered.”

**Hodgson’s office said a group of 10 Immigration and Customs Enforcement detainees refused to be tested for COVID-10 despite showing symptoms, then “rushed violently” at the sheriff and damaged their unit.**

Four members of the state’s congressional delegation – U.S. Sens. Elizabeth Warren and Ed Markey and Reps. William Keating and Joseph Kennedy – said the detainees reported that they were “handled violently, unnecessarily pepper-sprayed, and denied access to counsel.”

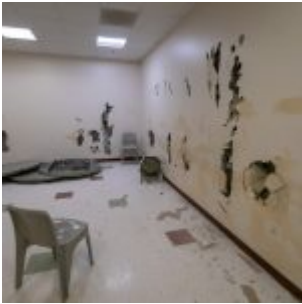
They called for an outside investigation, as did several Beacon Hill lawmakers. U.S. Rep. Ayanna Pressley on Monday evening released her own statement calling for a probe of the incident.

Spilka and Keenan said the committee’s investigation will focus on both the incident itself and why a senator was not allowed to visit the House of Corrections in the aftermath. While the press release did not name the lawmaker, a Spilka spokeswoman confirmed it referred to Sen. Sonia Chang-Diaz.

On Saturday, Chang-Diaz tweeted a picture of the facility’s exterior and said she had been barred from entering, “even as reporters (were) waived in” for a press conference with the sheriff.

Massachusetts legislators do not require permission of correctional facility officials to conduct visits, according to state law.

The Friday night incident drew extensive media coverage. During his Monday press briefing, Gov. Baker, a Republican, said discussions about the topic were on his “to-do list” for later that day.





“What I would say is, there is a whole series of back-and-forths going on with respect to what happened there and people need to be careful about drawing conclusions one way or another,” Baker said.

The governor said his administration has faced situations and “a number of nursing homes” where individuals who officials would have expected to want COVID-19 tests rejected the practice.

Baker said he thinks people should “embrace testing,” especially those in essential jobs and front-line positions.

“We’ve had to discipline some people for not being tested in places where they should probably be tested,” he said. He declined to elaborate, describing it as a “personnel matter.”

“But the fact of the matter is, not everybody wants to be tested, even people who you would think would consider that to be an appropriate thing given their role and their responsibility,” Baker said.

Health precautions in prisons and jails have been a target of scrutiny during the pandemic, particularly in Bristol County. Civil rights and immigration groups sued Hodgson and ICE in late March, alleging that immigrants in civil detention at the



facility were exposed to the highly infectious virus with no protections, sanitizer or disinfectant.

Hodgson sharply denied the allegations, describing the lawsuit through a spokesman as “a waste of the paper and ink it is printed on.”

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# **Massachusetts tax collections plunge by \$2.3 billion in April**

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State House News Service

State tax collections tumbled in April by more than \$2.3 billion compared to last April, another sign of the damage inflicted on the economy and the state's finances by forced business shutdowns aimed at slowing the spread of COVID-19.

Revenue Commissioner Geoffrey Snyder late Tuesday announced that collections last month totaled \$1.981 billion, down 54 percent, or \$2.34 billion, when compared to April 2019. Some of the decline stems from the state's decision in late March to push the April 15 income tax filing deadline to July 15.

April is typically the biggest month of the year for collections. The decline in revenue comes 10 months into fiscal 2020, a budget year where the state had been on track to possibly produce a surplus, before the pandemic struck.

Now, officials are poised to embrace short-term borrowing to offset some of the decline in receipts, with House and Senate leaders showing more interest in passing a borrowing

authorization bill filed by Gov. Charlie Baker in late March.

With hundreds of thousands of Massachusetts residents suddenly jobless during the pandemic, income taxes last month were down by nearly \$2.1 billion, or 65 percent, compared to April 2019, accounting for most of the year-over-year decline for the month.

It's unclear how much of the revenue plunge is attributable to the postponed filing deadline, and how much stems from the drop in economic activity.

The state reported Tuesday that the Department of Revenue received 24 percent fewer income tax returns through April 30 than the same period last year.

Evan Horowitz, executive director of the Center for State Policy Analysis at Tufts University, said that as much as 80 percent of the April drop may be attributable to the deferred tax-filing deadline, but added that "the slowdown is big." Horowitz said the latest income tax withholding and sales tax data suggested people are still earning money but not spending it, which he said may help with demand during a potential recovery.

With two months left in the fiscal year when the state has spent most of its more than \$43 billion budget, tax collections are running 6 percent, or nearly \$1.5 billion, behind the same 10-month period in fiscal 2019.

"The April revenue shortfall is attributable to multiple factors, including adjustments to tax payment deadlines across several categories, the extension of the personal income tax filing and payment deadline, and the overall impact that necessary COVID-19 precautions have on economic activity. We will continue to closely monitor the deferral of tax receipts and how COVID-19 impacts the economy for the remainder of the fiscal year," Snyder said in a statement.

The governor's office and Administration and Finance Secretary Michael Heffernan have pointed only to the borrowing bill when asked in recent weeks about plans to ensure a balanced fiscal 2020 state budget. Beyond that, an aide said, the administration is monitoring tax collections and federal funding.

A Heffernan spokesman had no further comment Tuesday in light of the news about April tax collection levels.

Massachusetts has about \$3.5 billion in its stabilization account, fiscal analysts recently gave the state's cash flow position a mostly favorable review, and the state is in store to receive federal aid to deal with coronavirus impacts and pay unemployment benefits.

The pandemic is causing lawmakers to pause state budget deliberations and recalibrate estimates and expectations, with one of the next steps being a new assessment of anticipated tax collections.

S&P Global Ratings in a late-April bulletin said it ran the state's cash flow projection from February through a stress test and found that, even without the additional cash flow financing bill, the state will have the liquid funds it would need to cover expenses for the remainder of fiscal year 2020, which ends June 30. The projection, S&P said, forecast a nonsegregated available cash balance of \$3.18 billion at the end of March.

Hit harder by the pandemic than other states, Massachusetts is still in the grips of its fight against the deadly and highly contagious virus. Economic reopening plans are being discussed with more intensity by the day, and a plan from a working group led by Lt. Gov. Karyn Polito is due this month.

Total confirmed COVID-19 cases in Massachusetts since the outbreak began surpassed 70,000 Tuesday, reaching 70,271, while 122 additional fatalities brought the death toll to

## **Massachusetts State Police K9 “Tank” helps Billerica police capture three wanted suspects**

“Shortly after 10:15 last night, Chelmsford Police located a vehicle wanted by Bedford Police. Massachusetts State Police K9 Unit Trooper Thomas Janeczak and his partner Tank (pictured) responded to assist in the search for three male suspects who were captured by a security camera as they ran from the vehicle.

Tank deployed from the vehicle and acquired a track across a parking lot. The track continued into the woods, then across another parking lot and then into a second wooded area.

Tank then became frantic at the wood line. Trooper Janeczak pulled the dog back and shone his flashlight into the woods at the point where Tank had a change of behavior. The Trooper saw two men in hoodies crouched down in the woods and gave a warning for them to surrender or face apprehension by Tank. Both men then emerged from their attempted hiding spot and gave up without further incident.

K9 units from Chelmsford and Billerica Police then deployed in that same area and, a short time later, located the third suspect in a landscaping company yard across from where Tank located the first two. All three suspects were turned over to Billerica Police.”

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# **Boston Police arrest one for failure to adhere to Social Distancing Protocols; additional gun charges**

“At about 12:48pm, on Tuesday, May 5, 2020, officers from District C-11 (Dorchester) responded to a call for a fight involving a person in possession of a firearm in the area of 569 Washington Street (Citizens Bank).

On arrival, officers spoke with the victims who stated that they were in line outside the bank when a verbal altercation bubbled up between another customer in line who refused to adhere to the recommended social distancing protocols. When asked to move away, the male suspect refusing to practice social distancing and adhere to the line restrictions, brandished a firearm and pointed it in the direction of the victims. Before police arrived, the male suspect and a female accomplice jumped into a motor vehicle and fled the scene.

After a description of the motor vehicle was broadcast over the police radio, officers were able to observe and stop the suspect's car in the area of 94 Whitfield Street. Given the presence of a firearm, both suspects were ordered to exit the vehicle. After the occupants were removed from the car, a search of the vehicle enabled officers to see and seize a loaded Bersa .380 semi-automatic firearm (see photo).

Officers arrested Ricardio Pantojas, 40, of Boston and charged him with the Unlawful Possession of a Firearm, Unlawful Possession of Ammunition, Carrying a Loaded Firearm on a Public Way and Assault and Battery by Means of a Dangerous

Weapon (Gun)."-Boston Police Department.

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# **Massachusetts State Police response to trespassers report leads to gun and narcotics charges**

Just before 1 a.m. Sunday, Trooper Brian Donaghey, assigned to the State Police-Boston Barracks, was conducting a security check of critical infrastructure at a Massachusetts Water Resources Authority facility on Memorial Drive in Cambridge when he encountered two trespassers in a motor vehicle in the parking lot.

Trooper Donaghey determined that the operator of the gray 2004 Toyota Camry was unlicensed, and had him exit the vehicle. When he did so, he observed a prescription bottle on the floor of the car; the bottle's sticker had been ripped off.

The Trooper subsequently determined that the bottle contained a large number of Percocet pills, for which the man did not have a prescription. After a further search of the vehicle Trooper Donaghey recovered a loaded, unlicensed Ruger Prescott LC9 9 millimeter handgun.

The operator, CARLOS GARCIA-PAREJO, 22, of Cambridge, was arrested for possession of an unlicensed handgun and possession of a Class B substance.

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# **New Bedford man arrested for robbing Walgreens with hypodermic needle**

On May 2, at approximately 9 p.m., New Bedford police officers responded to a report of an armed robbery at Walgreens on Cove Rd. Officers were advised that the suspect fled the store on a bicycle with an undisclosed amount of cash and used hypodermic needles to threaten the cashier.

After reviewing security footage and conducting an investigation Detectives arrested Steven Viera, 43, 61 County St., Apt. #2 on May 4. He is charged with armed robbery and uttering threats. Detective Brian Rei led the investigation.

If you have any information on criminal activity in your community, the New Bedford Police Dept. wants to hear from you. You can leave an anonymous tip on our voicemail at (508) 991-6300 Ext. 1.