

# New Bedford reports 31 new COVID-19 cases, one new death since Friday

Mayor Jon Mitchell's office reported 31 additional confirmed COVID-19 cases in New Bedford Saturday, bringing the total positive cases in the city to 441, **up from 410 on Friday**. One new COVID-19 related death was reported today bringing the total to 13. No specific details (age, sex of the patient, etc) are available.

The New Bedford Police Department welcomed home Sgt. Ortega who is recovering from COVID-19. Full details **here**.

Fall River reported 23 more confirmed positive cases of COVID-19 on Friday. According to Mayor Coogan's office, Fall River has seen 337 total positive cases. 149 cases have cleared isolation. Full details **here**.

While case numbers released by the Massachusetts Department of Health suggest the Bay State isn't out of the woods in the COVID-19 pandemic, a local group is getting ready to show their displeasure over how the virus has been handled.

Sarah Rebello, who co-hosts a conservative radio show in Fall River, has organized a rally to take place at Government Center to express what she feels is an unconstitutional lockdown. Full details **here**.

On April 24, the Massachusetts Public Health Department reported that the state added 4,946 more positive cases of COVID-19 bringing to total to 50,969. This is an increase from Thursday's 3,079 reported cases. 196 new COVID-19 related deaths were reported since yesterday, up from 178, bringing the total deaths in Massachusetts to 2,556. Full details **here**.

---

# Governor Baker files Medicaid waiver for MassHealth flexibility

Governor Baker yesterday announced new federal waiver requests to provide the state's MassHealth program with more flexibility to respond to COVID-19, and provided an update on Massachusetts' successful implementation of the new Pandemic Unemployment Assistance program.

**MassHealth Waiver Requests:** Massachusetts is filing two waiver requests with the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) that will give the state and its Medicaid program, MassHealth, more flexibility to respond to the COVID-19 public health emergency. If allowed, the waivers will build upon the two previously submitted waivers and enable MassHealth to deliver the most effective care to its members and support health care providers.

Through these waiver requests, the Commonwealth is seeking flexibility to address key areas of need:

Expand Medicare telehealth coverage to include services provided by phone and video, to increase access to health care for seniors and individuals with disabilities without readily accessible video technology. This expansion is consistent with telehealth coverage currently provided by MassHealth and commercial plans.

Allow MassHealth to waive the requirement that certain applicants and members spend down to qualify for coverage in cases of financial hardship.

Extend retroactive coverage for individuals who qualify for MassHealth to allow individuals to be covered up to 90 days prior to submitting their application.

Provide flexibility for federal provider payment limits to enable MassHealth to provide critical stabilization funds to health care providers.

Ease provider requirements that could result in unnecessary administrative burdens or barriers to care.

**PUA Unemployment System Launch:** Earlier this week, Massachusetts became one of the first states in the nation to successfully implement the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) program established by the federal CARES Act. This program provides benefits for individuals who do not qualify for traditional unemployment benefits, but have lost their jobs due to COVID-19.

The platform launched on April 20, 10 days ahead of the previously scheduled launch date. Since then, the PUA system has so far processed well over 100,000 claims, and benefit checks, which include an additional \$600 as part of another federal CARES Act benefit implemented by the administration, are already being issued.

Visit [www.mass.gov/pua](http://www.mass.gov/pua) to learn more and apply.

---

## Another very busy week for Massachusetts State Police

# K9s and their human partners

“As the Massachusetts State Police continue to perform specialized duties related to the state’s response to the Coronavirus emergency, traditional police work continues because crime doesn’t stop.

Last week was another busy one for the Massachusetts State Police K9 Unit, which deployed on 68 missions. MSP K9 teams responded to 25 incidents and operations handled primarily by State Police, and assisted local police departments around the state on 43 additional calls.

Missions included 26 patrol calls, six drug sniffs, one scent search for a gun and one other for a cadaver. Another mission was a search for a potentially suicidal person. Nine of the calls involved suspects reported to be armed, all with handguns.



*Massa*

*chusetts State Police photo.*

Three examples of the K9 Unit's work last week follow.

On the evening of April 15, MSP K9 Trooper Bill McSweeney

observed a vehicle that had been involved in a shooting in Brockton. The suspect vehicle attempted to strike Trooper McSweeney's cruiser and then fled into Stoughton with the Trooper in pursuit. The suspect stopped in Stoughton, got out of the vehicle, and continued to flee on foot. Trooper McSweeney deployed his partner Scully, who tracked the suspect through a swamp and pursued him out to the other side, where the suspect was apprehended by a Trooper on the perimeter.

On April 18, in the pre-dawn hours, K9 Trooper Dan Purtell responded to a call for a wrong-way driver on Route 3 in Burlington. The suspect, an alleged drunk driver, crashed and fled on foot. Trooper Purtell and his partner Neko tracked the suspect for about three miles but did not locate him. Later that morning, still well before daylight, Burlington officers spotted a person matching a description of the wrong-way driver in Cambridge Street.





*Massachusetts State Police photo.*

Upon seeing the officers the suspect ran into nearby woods. Trooper Purtell and Neko responded to the point where he was

last seen: Neko acquired a track and pulled behind a building and then into the wooded area. Well inside the woods, Neko suddenly turned left and displayed a proximity alert. Then, Trooper Purtell observed the suspect on the ground. After initially ignoring orders to surrender or face apprehension by Neko, the suspect wisely complied, was taken into custody, and was charged with operating under the influence, his fourth OUI offense.

Another pre-dawn mission was fulfilled that same morning, far across the state, when Trooper Greg Valentine responded to help Westfield Police search for a wanted suspect who was on foot. Trooper Valentine deployed his partner Kyber at the place where the fleeing suspect was last seen. Kyber acquired a track in a backyard and pulled across the street and eventually came to a six-foot high fence. Kyber began to bark and jump at the fence. The search team made its way around the fence and the suspect was located and apprehended by a perimeter officer.”

---

## **Boston Police Department welcomes officer Omar Borges home after month-long battle with COVID-19**

“BPD Officers Flock to Beth Israel Hospital to Celebrate the Patient Discharge of BPD Officer Omar Borges Now Home Recovering from COVID-19:

On Friday, April 24, 2020, at about 5:00pm, a wonderfully joyous and emotional scene as hundreds of Boston Police



Officers gathered outside the Beth Israel Hospital's Rosenberg Building to cheer on and welcome home Officer Omar Borges upon his discharge from hospital care after a grueling, month-long battle with the coronavirus.

Officer Borges, who appeared at the front door in a wheelchair, was overcome by emotion upon being greeted by a thunderous ovation courtesy of his brother and sister officers, as well as, the nurses and doctors who treated and cared for him during his stay at the hospital. Officers looked on with tears in their eyes as Omar's family smothered him with hugs, kisses and love before entering a silver-colored SUV that transported Omar to his home.

Said Commissioner Gross, "This is a day to celebrate and, as you can see, Omar's family is happy to have him home." Yet, sadly, as happy as we are to celebrate Omar's return to good health, we would be remiss to not take a moment to keep in our prayers the family and friends of Boston Police Officer Jose Fontanez who succumbed to COVID-19 on April 14, 2020.

Said Commissioner Gross, "Today, we celebrate the release of Officer Borges while also remembering the loss of Officer Fontanez. This is a serious disease and it remains important for all of us to follow the steps required to lessen the spread of this virus."

***Boston Police Department photos:***



---

# **New Bedford Police Department welcomes home Sgt. Ortega who is beating COVID-19**

The following is from the New Bedford Police Department.

"We have some great news to share!

Yesterday, we welcomed home our very own Sgt. Sam Ortega who is beating COVID-19! Sgt. Ortega returned home from a Boston hospital and sends his thanks to all those who have cared and prayed for him, his wife and family.

Thanks to New Bedford EMS and our great friends at Dominos on Ashley Blvd. through @Tony Squizzero, you made this hero's homecoming extra special!

#beatcovid19

#heros

#homecoming”

---

# Warren calls for watchdog investigation into “border wall cronyism”

United States Senator Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.), member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, and House Committee on Homeland Security Chairman Bennie G. Thompson (D-Miss.) sent a letter to the Acting Inspector General of the Department of Defense (DOD), urging an investigation into the recent decision by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) to award a \$569 million no-bid contract to BFBC, a company led by a Republican campaign donor, to build a section of President Trump’s border wall at above-average cost. Their letter asks for an investigation of whether the award of the contract to BFBC subverted federal procurement laws and resulted in taxpayer waste. The IG is already conducting an investigation into a \$400 million contract awarded to Fisher Sand and Gravel (FSG), another company led by a reliable Republican Party donor.

“Particularly now, as we must prioritize funding to save lives and to help the millions of Americans who have suffered severe economic harms as a result of the coronavirus pandemic, taxpayer funds must not be wasted, and Federal procurement processes must not favor campaign donors or personal favorites of the President,” the lawmakers wrote.

BFBC has so far received more than \$1 billion in taxpayer money to build the border wall. In this newest contract, USACE

is paying \$33 million per mile of border wall—a price that is more than 50% higher than the \$20 million per-mile average reported in January. This appears to be just the latest in a series of lucrative contracts awarded to Republican donors to build President Trump's border wall.

“Federal procurement and contracting laws prevent corruption, ensuring that taxpayer funds are spent to hire contractors that can do the job right, do it safely, and do it as inexpensively as possible,” wrote the lawmakers. “The Trump Administration's decision to award an expensive, no-bid contract for hundreds of millions of dollars to a company favored by the President calls into question the Administration's compliance with Federal procurement laws and demands a thorough investigation.”

In December 2019, the USACE awarded a \$400 million border wall contract to FSG, a company with a shoddy environmental and tax compliance record, after President Trump and Jared Kushner met privately with the Commanding General of USACE. In response to that award, Rep. Thompson sent a letter to the DOD Principal Deputy Inspector General, asking him to open an investigation. Senator Warren also sent a letter to USACE, asking for details on the solicitation and award of the contract. FSG remains under investigation by the DOD Office of the Inspector General.

Senator Warren has taken numerous steps to oppose President Trump's border wall. Less than three weeks after President Trump took office, she led colleagues on a letter to the Secretary of Homeland Security raising concerns about the potential diversion of funds from key DHS priorities to pay for the border wall. In February 2020, she introduced the Prioritizing Pandemic Prevention Act (S. 3510), to recoup all of the unobligated funds taken from Pentagon accounts to pay for the wall and redirect them to COVID-19 response. In February 2019, she introduced the Protecting Disaster Relief Funds Act (S. 534), to prevent President Trump from using

funds appropriated for disaster relief to fund construction of a border wall. In March 2017, Senator Warren cosponsored a bill (S. 668) to nullify President Trump's executive order that a border wall be built.

2020.04.23 Letter to DOD IG about border wall contract final

USACEreview

---

## **Massachusetts lawmakers seek federal assistance for cranberry growers amid coronavirus pandemic**

United States Senator Elizabeth Warren (D-MA) and Representative William Keating (D-MA-09), along with Senator Edward J. Markey (D-MA) and Representatives Richard E. Neal (D-MA-01), James P. McGovern (D-MA-02), Stephen F. Lynch (D-MA-08), Joseph P. Kennedy III (D-MA-04), Katherine Clark (D-MA-05) and Lori Trahan (D-MA-03), wrote to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) urging the agency to provide direct, financial assistance to the cranberry industry struggling to keep workers on payroll and remain afloat financially amid the economic collapse caused by the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic.

"While the COVID-19 pandemic continues to threaten jobs and local economies across the country... it is critical that our cranberry growers have the resources they need to keep staff employed on local farms," the lawmakers wrote.

As of 2015, the value of Massachusetts' cranberry industry was \$99.8 million and supported nearly 7,000 jobs. However, press reports have stated that, "Like many small businesses, farms could feel devastating effects of the pandemic" and that "farms and ranches that sell locally could see a decline in sales of as much as \$688.7 million." While the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act included \$9.5 billion for farmers, it is largely up to USDA to distribute it among livestock producers, specialty crop producers and those who sell at farmers markets.

Citing the projected economic losses for cranberry growers-as well as the industry's recent economic struggles due to overproduction and the impact of Chinese tariffs-the lawmakers urged Secretary Perdue to utilize all USDA programs to assist the domestic cranberry industry.

"Given the recent economic hardships of the cranberry industry, particularly in Massachusetts, we urge you to take action to ensure that the USDA considers the unique and dire situation of cranberry growers in the administration's economic response to COVID-19," the lawmakers continued.

In November, Senators Warren and Markey, along with Representatives Keating and Kennedy, wrote to U.S. Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer urging him to explore new markets for American cranberry growers to compensate for China's 40 percent tariff on imported cranberries, which had cost the industry an estimated \$42.8 million in losses over the past year.

04.23.2020 Letter from Sens. Warren & Markey and Reps. Neal, McGovern, Lynch, Keating, Kennedy, Clark, & Trahan to Sec. Perdue

---



# **FDA authorizes first COVID-19 at-home test collection kits**

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration authorized the first diagnostic test with a home collection option for COVID-19. Specifically, the FDA re-issued the emergency use authorization (EUA) for the Laboratory Corporation of America (LabCorp) COVID-19 RT-PCR Test to permit testing of samples self-collected by patients at home using LabCorp's Pixel by LabCorp COVID-19 Test home collection kit.

"Throughout this pandemic we have been facilitating test development to ensure patients access to accurate diagnostics, which includes supporting the development of reliable and accurate at-home sample collection options," said FDA Commissioner Stephen M. Hahn, M.D. "The FDA's around-the-clock work since this outbreak began has resulted in the authorization of more than 50 diagnostic tests and engagement with over 350 test developers. Specifically, for tests that include home sample collection, we worked with LabCorp to ensure the data demonstrated from at-home patient sample collection is as safe and accurate as sample collection at a doctor's office, hospital or other testing site. With this action, there is now a convenient and reliable option for patient sample collection from the comfort and safety of their home."

This reissued EUA for LabCorp's molecular test permits testing of a sample collected from the patient's nose using a designated self-collection kit that contains nasal swabs and saline. Once patients self-swab to collect their nasal sample, they mail their sample, in an insulated package, to a LabCorp lab for testing. LabCorp intends to make the Pixel by LabCorp COVID-19 Test home collection kits available to consumers in most states, with a doctor's order, in the coming weeks.

The LabCorp home self-collection kit includes a specific Q-tip-style cotton swab for patients to use to collect their sample. Due to concerns with sterility and cross-reactivity due to inherent genetic material in cotton swabs, other cotton swabs should not be used with this test at the present time. The FDA continues to work with test developers to determine whether or not Q-tip-style cotton swab can be used safely and effectively with other tests.

This authorization only applies to the LabCorp COVID-19 RT-PCR Test for at-home collection of nasal swab specimens using the Pixel by LabCorp COVID-19 home collection kit. It is important to note that this is not a general authorization for at-home collection of patient samples using other collection swabs, media, or tests, or for tests fully conducted at home.

The FDA, an agency within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, protects the public health by assuring the safety, effectiveness, and security of human and veterinary drugs, vaccines and other biological products for human use, and medical devices. The agency also is responsible for the safety and security of our nation's food supply, cosmetics, dietary supplements, products that give off electronic radiation, and for regulating tobacco products.

---

## **Massachusetts tops 50,000 positive COVID-19 cases, 20,000 tests in a single day**

### **Massachusetts Coronavirus Update**

On April 24, the Massachusetts Public Health Department

reported that the state added 4,946 more positive cases of COVID-19 bringing to total to 50,969. This is an increase from Thursday's 3,079 reported cases. 196 new COVID-19 related deaths were reported since yesterday, up from 178, bringing the total deaths in Massachusetts to 2,556.



As of 4 pm today, 215,213 people in Massachusetts have been tested for COVID-19 – 20,137 new tests since yesterday.

A Bristol County Sheriff's Office corrections officer has tested positive for COVID-19. Full details [here](#).

The number of COVID-19 cases in Chelsea, a city that's been particularly hard hit by the coronavirus, has more than doubled in the past week, according to new state data. Full details [here](#).

### **New Bedford Coronavirus Update**

Mayor Jon Mitchell's office reported 58 additional confirmed COVID-19 cases in New Bedford Friday morning, bringing the total positive cases in the city to 410, **up from 352 on Thursday**. No new deaths reported today. New Bedford added two more COVID-19 related death on Thursday bringing the total to 12. No specific details (age, sex of the patient, etc) are available.

### **Fall River Coronavirus Update**

Fall River reported 23 more confirmed positive cases of COVID-19 on Friday. According to Mayor Coogan's Office, Fall River has seen 337 total positive cases. Full details [here](#).

---

# **Corrections Officer is seventh Bristol County Sheriff's Office staff member to test positive for COVID-19**

A Bristol County Sheriff's Office corrections officer has tested positive for COVID-19.

The corrections officer was last at the facility in Dartmouth on Sunday, April 19, when he worked in a housing unit during second shift. The officer became ill during his days off, Monday and Tuesday, and tested positive for COVID-19 on Wednesday, April 22.

He is the seventh Bristol County staff member to test positive for the virus. Three staffers have fully recovered and returned to duty and the others are expected to fully recover and return to work in the coming days and weeks.

"We have always been mindful that staff and their families are out in the community at the grocery store, gas station and other places when shopping or tending to other responsibilities, and that is why we have strict screening, sanitation and reporting requirements in place to minimize the risk of exposure to our staff and inmate population," Sheriff Thomas M. Hodgson said. "There are hundreds of essential workers here around the clock, from our security staff to health care professionals, food services teams and administration, finance, programs and support staff. In the face of a national pandemic, these dedicated corrections professionals continue, day in and day out, to report for duty and work together as a team to maintain our first-class standards of care and custody."

Currently, no one incarcerated in a Bristol County corrections

facility has tested positive for the virus. Eight symptomatic prisoners have tested negative.

Over the past month, the Bristol County Sheriff's Office has instituted many protocols to protect inmates, detainees and staff from the Coronavirus outbreak. Some of those measures include:

- All employees were given masks that must be worn inside the secure perimeter of our facilities. All inmates and detainees have also been given masks to wear for protection.
- All areas of the facility are being cleaned\disinfected every day on every shift.
- All staff members are being screened before entering the buildings; new arriving inmates are being screened before being accepted into custody.
- In-person visitation has been suspended to limit the number of people coming in and out.

"There are almost 2,200 confirmed cases in Bristol County and more than 46,000 positives in Massachusetts," Sheriff Hodgson said. "The virus is taking its toll on our neighborhoods, communities, states and our nation. Everyone's on edge, but we will get through this. Saturday's supposed to be a great day weather-wise in Bristol County, so I hope everyone gets some fresh air while maintaining proper social distancing and hygiene. Have a safe weekend everyone."