

Advocates: Mail method matters in voting reform bill

Chris Van Buskirk
State House News Service

As an extensive vote-by-mail bill moves to the Senate, one voting rights advocacy organization and the association representing town clerks hope the upper chamber will address several outstanding issues including delivery requirements for mail-in ballots.

The mail-in voting legislation (H 4768) comes as a response to public health concerns associated with COVID-19. As government officials urge social distancing, some voters might be discouraged from showing up in-person to the polls in September and November. The House, voting 155-1, sent the bill to the Senate Thursday night after tackling around 27 amendments.

MassVote Policy and Communications Manager Alex Psilakis said he hopes the Senate will address language in the bill dictating which mailing method the state will use – options include first class or bulk mail. Under the current bill, the state is required to pay for return envelopes but the postage class is not specified.

This poses an issue, Psilakis said, as the state could choose to use bulk mail, which is not postmarked. If the bulk mail arrives after Election Day, local clerks would not count it. To rectify the concern, Psilakis said the Senate could change the language to “mailed by” as opposed to “postmarked by.”

“That’s impacting thousands or tens of thousands or hundreds of thousands of voters, that’s going to mean their vote isn’t counted,” he said in an interview. “Some legislators are worried that if you allow people to mail it by Election Day,

that leaves more room for voter fraud and that's just not the case."

Rep. Natalie Blais (D-Sunderland) filed an unsuccessful amendment that would have required the state to pay for United States Postal Service first class mail for any mailing requirements detailed in the legislation.

Sen. Barry Finegold, Senate chair of Election Laws, said the legislation the House passed is a step in the right direction. The three options in the bill – early voting periods, voting in-person on Election Day, and voting by mail – help address public health concerns regarding physical distancing, he said.

Finegold said the House decision to institute the "postmarked by" deadline for mail-in ballots is sufficient.

"If you're concerned about the pandemic, you don't have to come to the polls, if you're concerned about the crowd, you can vote early," he told the News Service. "And if you'd like, the day of the election, you can show up the day of the election."

A timetable for Senate consideration of the bill was not available Friday from Senate President Karen Spilka's office. The Senate plans for next week currently include only two informal sessions.

Andy Dowd, legislative committee chair of the Massachusetts Town Clerks Association, said overall the bill addresses key concerns of local clerks such as allowing them to tabulate votes prior to Election Day. Dowd said he hopes the Senate will address the front-end process of requesting a ballot.

"The challenge on our end is that those application forms are going to be returned to us by mail or I believe there will be an option for folks to email them back, which is great. We like to make things as easy as possible," he told the News Service. "But then once we receive it, again, that's where the

manual labor intensive process tends to bog down the system.”

The House bill would direct Secretary of State William Galvin to send out applications for mail-in ballots by July 15 and provide early voting options before the September primary and November general elections.

Over the course of two days, House lawmakers hashed out what voting-by-mail would look like during the 2020 primaries and general elections. On Wednesday, lawmakers abruptly paused mid-debate out of respect for protests on Boston Common and logistical concerns surrounding traffic associated with the demonstrations.

Legislators resumed their session Thursday and worked for nearly eight hours before passing the bill. The session was the first serious test of the House’s new remote voting format for a bill with multiple amendments drawing debate. Chairman Aaron Michlewitz said overall, the session went smoothly.

“A few hiccups here and there, but most members that wanted to speak on an amendment were able to do that,” he told the News Service after Thursday’s session. “We were able to have a good dialogue with the membership, even though they were [participating] remotely.”

Rep. Paul Mark (D-Peru), who represents rural communities, raised during debate the need for funding to aid in the implementation of the bill for smaller municipalities. House Election Laws Chairman John Lawn said he understands this election cycle will place an “enormous” pressure on clerks to deal with an increase in mail.

“So we listened to that and working with the central tabulation amendment was their number one priority and I think that amendment really accomplishes that and helps out the clerks,” Lawn said, referencing an amendment that would allow clerks to tabulate votes prior to Election Day.

Psilakis said MassVote is also disappointed that the bill would close the period to request an absentee ballot seven days before election day – another point he hopes the Senate will tackle. In years prior, he said, a voter could request an absentee ballot at noon the day before the election.

“That’s something that we really don’t want to see,” he said. “Because loads of people could be in that situation where something comes up, and they just want to go to their local local hall to get their ballot.”

Finegold said it was important to institute a cutoff time to give clerks time to handle absentee ballots.

“I feel there’s plenty of options for people to get to the polls and to vote,” Finegold said.

The Election Modernization Coalition, a group of seven voting rights organizations that includes the ACLU, Common Cause Massachusetts, and MassVote – praised the House bill in a joint statement, writing Friday that the bill is “a very strong reform to our election laws.”

“This election is going to be one of the most consequential in our lifetime, with enormous implications for communities of color,” said Rahsaan Hall, director of the Racial Justice Program at the ACLU of Massachusetts. “We’re grateful to the House for moving this vital bill quickly. We need to protect democratic participation, safeguard public health, and ensure equitable ballot access for all voters.”

Trump administration ordered to reconsider Mashpee Wampanoag ruling

Colin A. Young

State House News Service

A federal judge ruled late Friday in favor of the **Mashpee Wampanoag tribe** in its circuitous quest to maintain control of 321 acres of reservation land in Mashpee and Taunton, saying the Trump administration's 2018 declaration that the tribe does not qualify as "Indian" under the federal Indian Reorganization Act was "arbitrary, capricious, an abuse of discretion, and contrary to law."

U.S. District Judge Paul Friedman granted the tribe's motion for summary judgment in the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia case – Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe v. Interior Secretary David Bernhardt – in which the tribe argued that the interior secretary failed to properly consider extensive factual evidence it submitted to make the case that it should be eligible for land in trust. The judge remanded the matter to the Department of the Interior for the agency to reconsider.

In a statement, Tribal Council Chairman Cedric Cromwell said Friedman "righted what would have been a terrible and historic injustice."

"While we are pleased with the court's findings, our work is not done. The Department of Interior must now draft a positive decision for our land as instructed by Judge Friedman. We will continue to work with the Department of the Interior " and fight them if necessary " to ensure our land remains in trust," the chairman said.

The tribe's land in trust status has been under contention for years. The tribe was federally-recognized in 2007 and the Obama administration took the land into trust for the tribe in early 2016. But the Trump administration has worked to undo that designation at the same time that the tribe has worked to build a \$1 billion casino on its land in Taunton.

Sen. Marc Pacheco, who lives in and represents the city where the Wampanoag tribe hopes to build its casino, said he was pleased with Friedman's ruling.

"Throughout the course of this dispute, the tribe has consistently argued that the Department of the Interior failed to apply the correct standards in deciding to invalidate the tribe's land-in-trust – this new ruling certainly seems to validate that argument," he said. "The Court's recent decision will hopefully prevent the shameful injustice of taking land from the tribe that greeted the Pilgrims as we celebrate the 400th anniversary of their arrival here in the Commonwealth."

In March, Bernhardt ordered the tribe's land be taken out of trust status, putting the sovereignty of the tribe's 321 acres of reservation land in Mashpee and Taunton in question. The tribe is appealing another case challenging its land in trust status, *Littlefield et al. v. U.S. Department of the Interior*, at the U.S. Court of Appeals for the First Circuit.

In addition to the tribe trying to secure its land in trust through the courts, U.S. Rep. William Keating has pushed federal legislation that would use the power of Congress to reaffirm the 2015 decision by the Interior Department to take land into trust for the tribe, though President Donald Trump has opposed it.

In a statement Saturday, Keating said the judge's ruling was a victory for the tribe and a repudiation of the Trump administration's "policy designed to punish the Mashpee Wampanoag."

“Judge Freidman described the actions of the Administration with regard to the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe as arbitrary and capricious. I think that rightly describes the Administration’s actions to remove the Tribe’s land from trust during the most serious public health emergency of our lifetime — actions that defy reason and basic decency,” Keating said. “I applaud Judge Friedman’s decision, but given that it remands the issue back to the Department of the Interior, we must now remain vigilant to ensure that the Trump Administration does not continue with the flagrant pattern of disregard for tribal rights.”

The U.S. House of Representatives voted 275-146 in May 2019 to approve that bill, titled the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe Reservation Reaffirmation Act, and it has not moved since being referred to the U.S. Senate that same month.

The fate of the tribe’s land in trust could also have a significant impact on the state’s commercial casino industry. The Mass. Gaming Commission could still issue a license for a commercial casino in Region C — the commission’s name for Bristol, Plymouth, Barnstable, Dukes and Nantucket counties — but some worry that commercial casino operators might not be willing to invest the minimum \$500 million in a project that would have to compete with a nearby tribal casino.

Plus, if the Gaming Commission opts to go ahead with licensing a commercial casino in Region C and the tribe is allowed to open its own casino under federal law, Massachusetts would receive no tax revenue from the tribal casino.

Speaking to the Gaming Commission in October, Pacheco advocated for gathering as much information as possible before regulators make any decision on Region C and suggested that any “definitive” ruling from the administration this year could be changed based on the outcome of November’s presidential election.

President Trump lifts commercial fishing ban in protected area

In an announcement cheered by the fishing industry and described as an “attack on our ocean” by opponents, President Donald Trump on Friday reversed a four-year-old decision by President Barack Obama that had abruptly ended commercial fishing within a 5,000-square mile area of the Atlantic Ocean deemed a national marine monument.

Trump’s new proclamation will not alter the boundaries of the Northeast Canyons and Seamounts Marine National Monument, which is the size of Connecticut, but amends the commercial fishing restrictions on its use that Obama had put in place using powers granted under the Antiquities Act of 1906. At the time, the Obama administration said the protections would “improve ocean resilience in the face of climate change, and help to sustain the ocean ecosystems and fishing economies in these regions for the long run.”

The president announced his decision during a visit to Bangor, Maine on Friday afternoon, where he was joined by former Gov. Paul LePage and fishing industry interests. Obama’s 2016 decision was “deeply unfair to Maine lobstermen” and “cost America’s fishermen millions of dollars,” Trump said.

“We’re opening it today,” the president said, according to a White House transcript. “We’re undoing his executive order.”

“You’re taking down a ‘no fishing’ sign and opening up fishing,” Interior Secretary David Bernhardt said. “I love that,” Trump responded.

The canyons and seamounts area is on the edge of the continental shelf, and situated about 130 miles southeast of Massachusetts.

The proclamation recognizes the monument area as a haven for seabirds, whales, dolphins, turtles, and migratory fish species such as tuna, billfish, and sharks, but also points to existing fisheries management laws and states “appropriately managed commercial fishing would not put the objects of scientific and historic interest that the monument protects at risk.”

Trump said the United States is “blessed with some of the richest ocean resources anywhere in the world,” but imports over 85 percent of the fish consumed here. A task force he’s forming will identify opportunities to open foreign markets to seafood exports, Trump said, adding that he also plans on “further cracking down on illegal harvested and imported seafood.”

“We’re going to send our fishermen out there,” Trump said. “You’re going to go fishing in that area now that you haven’t seen for a long time. Lobstermen and seafood producers, I want to just congratulate you.”

The Conservation Law Foundation quickly announced it plans to file a lawsuit challenging Trump’s amendment to Proclamation 9496 of Sept. 15, 2016.

The monument designation protects “ancient and fragile coral communities, endangered whales, and an abundance of unique and rare marine life,” according to the foundation, which intervened in a 2018 federal lawsuit where the court ruled that the Northeast Canyons and Seamounts was created legally.

Foundation president Bradley Campbell said Trump was pandering to fishing interests at a time when people are focused on the COVID-19 pandemic and protests against police brutality and racism.

“Once again, the president is making cynical use of the national crises he has inflamed to pander to the very few New Englanders who may still have faith in his leadership,” Campbell said in a statement. “Having ravaged our economy nationally, Trump is now dismantling the few protections now in place to avert the demise of New England’s traditional marine fisheries, culture, and economy. We call on the New England delegation and the public to fight this attack on our ocean and our future by all means available.”

Maggie Raymond, executive director of the Associated Fisheries of Maine, joined Trump in Maine and said opposition to Obama’s declaration has come not only from the fishing industry but also from regional fishery management councils. The councils, she said, argue the fisheries should be managed under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act and not “outside of the regular management process.”

“We don’t need the Antiquities Act to be establishing monuments that restrict fishing,” Raymond said.

Raymond also told the president that the fishing sector can’t afford costs she estimated at \$40,000 a year for some vessels associated with an expected New England Fishery Management Council vote in the fall concerning at-sea monitors on vessels during all fishing trips.

“This is simply an expense that we cannot afford at this time, especially on the heels – when we’ll be trying to recover from this pandemic, which has had a huge impact on the commercial fishing industry in New England,” she said.

Groups pressing to restore fishing stocks have pressed for the use of monitors on vessels to guard against overfishing.

After Raymond expressed her views about the cost of at-sea monitors, Trump asked Bernhardt about the matter and he responded that it was “in process.”

“Get it done,” the president responded, according to the transcript. “We’ll get it done. You’re not going to have to –”

At the time of Obama’s monument designation in 2016, the Baker administration said it was “deeply disappointed” by the decision and later raised questions about the process while expressing support for the fishing industry and resource protection.

Mayor Mitchell announces New Bedford will follow state guidelines for second phase of reopening

Mayor Jon Mitchell announced Saturday that the City of New Bedford will follow and implement **the second phase of Governor Charlie Baker’s reopening plan**, which allows for additional sector reopening on Monday, June 8.

The plan includes sector-specific guidance for businesses and operations permitted to reopen with guidelines during the second phase. The Governor’s plan may be found here: <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/reopening-massachusetts>.

New Bedford’s restaurant reopening advisory group, co-chaired by City Planner Tabitha Harkin and local businessman and restaurateur Stephen Silverstein, has released guidelines outlining outdoor dining which begins in Massachusetts including New Bedford on Monday, June 8, available at

<https://www.newbedford-ma.gov/health-department/city-guidance-on-reopening-of-dining-establishments/>. Restaurant reopening begins with outdoor dining and appropriate social distancing.

For city dining establishments, the reopening and outdoor dining process includes an expedited Outdoor Cafe permitting process, with easy-to-follow guidance to comply with the state's public health and safety requirements. The permit is also available at <https://www.newbedford-ma.gov/health-department/city-guidance-on-reopening-of-dining-establishments/>. This is a simple, quick process intended to ensure restaurants and dining establishments are able to proceed with outdoor dining easily, while protecting the health and safety of workers and patrons.

Playgrounds will also reopen with social distancing on Monday, June 8. Outdoor recreation including youth and adult sports leagues and golf facilities reopen with the state's guidelines on Monday, June 8. Retail businesses and close contact personal services also reopen Monday, June 8, with state guidelines. Detailed questions may be directed to the City's Department of Parks, Recreation & Beaches.

Details on reopening in New Bedford are available at <https://www.newbedford-ma.gov/health-department/coronavirus/>. The page will be updated as further details to the Phase 2 reopening announcements are made by the state.

COVID-19 rates of transmission have declined in Massachusetts, and more recently in New Bedford. The potential for transmission of COVID-19 remains real, and mask-wearing and social distancing remain in effect in order to protect the health and safety of all residents. All residents are urged to continue to follow city, state, and federal guidelines to ensure they protect themselves, their families, and others. New Bedford's total positive COVID-19 cases as of June 6 stand at 1,970 cases, with 81 total fatalities in New Bedford due to COVID-19. Current information on COVID-19 trends may be found

on the city's website:
<https://www.newbedford-ma.gov/health-department/coronavirus/>.

For more information on the status of reopening in New Bedford and other important news, visit the COVID-19 page on www.newbedford-ma.gov. For information on the masks available to any New Bedford resident who wants one, visit www.masknb.com.

Reopening Massachusetts: Baker initiates transition to second phase on Monday

The Baker-Polito Administration today announced that Phase II of the Commonwealth's reopening plan will begin on June 8th.

Businesses and sectors set to begin opening in Phase II are subject to compliance with all mandatory safety standards.

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, has been closely monitored and seen a significant decline allowing for Phase II to begin on June 8th.

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 82 percent, the 3-day average of hospitalized patients is down 55 percent, and the number of hospitals in surge is down 76 percent.

A total of 630,000 viral COVID-19 tests have been completed, and testing continues to increase throughout the state.

The following businesses will be eligible to reopen in Step One of Phase II on June 8, with contingencies:

- Retail, with occupancy limits;
- Childcare facilities and day camps, with detailed guidance;
- Restaurants, outdoor table service only;
- Hotels and other lodgings, no events, functions or meetings;
- Warehouses and distribution centers;
- Personal services without close physical contact, such as home cleaning, photography, window washing, career coaching and education tutoring;
- Post-secondary, higher education, vocational-tech and occupation schools for the purpose of completing graduation requirements;
- Youth and adult amateur sports, with detailed guidance;
- Outdoor recreation facilities
- Professional sports practices, no games or public admissions;
- Non-athletic youth instructional classes in arts, education or life skills and in groups of less than 10;
- Driving and flight schools
- Outdoor historical spaces, no functions, gatherings or guided tours;
- Funeral homes, with occupancy limits

The following businesses will be eligible reopen in Step Two of Phase II at a later date to be determined:

- Indoor table service at restaurants
- Close-contact personal services, with restrictions, including:

- Hair removal and replacement
- Nail care
- Skin care
- Massage therapy
- Makeup salons and makeup application services
- Tanning salons
- Tattoo, piercing and body art services
- Personal training, with restrictions

Full list and safety protocols available at www.mass.gov/reopening.

The Baker-Polito Administration also released other sector specific guidance:

Health care providers may also incrementally resume in-person elective, non-urgent procedures and services, including routine office visits, dental visits and vision care subject to compliance with public health and safety standards. All other in-person medical, behavioral health, dental and vision services may also resume on June 8th, except for elective cosmetic procedures and in-person day programs, which will be included in Phase III. Telehealth must continue to be utilized and prioritized to the greatest extent possible, whenever feasible and appropriate.

Limited reopening of visitation will also begin, and all visitation is subject to infection control protocol, social distancing and face coverings. Given the diversity of facilities and programs, there are specific timetables for visitation, and congregate care programs will be reaching out to families with specific details on scheduling visits.

T will no longer transport police to protests

Chris Lisinski

State House News Service

The MBTA will no longer use its buses to transport non-transit law enforcement to and from protests against police violence that have occurred in Boston and other cities and towns across the state over the past week.

Following outcry from activists and direction from the Fiscal and Management Control Board that oversees T operations, the MBTA changed its policy effective Friday, spokesman Joe Pesaturo confirmed. The Boston Globe first reported the news earlier in the day. Pesaturo said “several members” of the FMCB instructed MBTA officials to halt using buses as transportation from police staging areas to demonstration sites, but did not reply to follow-up questions about whether the direction came in the form of a formal vote or if any of the five board members disagreed. Transit Police personnel will still be allowed on T vehicles “in support of their public safety responsibilities safeguarding MBTA infrastructure,” Pesaturo said.

The T has faced sharp criticism over transporting police, which the TransitMatters advocacy group said it “watched in disappointment,” and for taking downtown Boston subway stations offline during protests, limiting options for protesters attempting to return home. After the agency changed its police transport policy Friday, the State Police Association of Massachusetts blasted the decision as “shameful and overtly pander(ing) to the false rhetoric and anti-police agenda of the few.”

“More important, they fail to support our defense of the

peaceful calls for change of the many,” the union said, also aiming complaints at UMass Boston for closing the school’s campus to police parking. “These actions place needless hurdles to the protection of life and property, and they put the public at large at risk.”

Protests, coronavirus leave Massachusetts in “balancing act”

Matt Murphy

State House News Service

Thousands of people congregating night after night to protest police brutality and the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis poses a risk for the spread of COVID-19, Gov. Charlie Baker acknowledged on Wednesday, but the governor said the state has no intention of trying to discourage these types of gatherings.

“Any time there’s big gatherings with close quarters the potential for spread is real,” Baker said, calling it a “balancing act” between public health and First Amendment rights.

“We are still in the midst of a terribly dangerous and wildly contagious virus and this is certainly going to be a risk,” Baker said.

Baker addressed the protests first thing at a State House press conference on Wednesday after demonstrations in Boston and Brockton the night before, which included some clashes

between protesters and police. The governor did not have a briefing on Tuesday, making these his first comments since Monday when he addressed the violence and vandalism in Boston over the weekend and President Donald Trump's insistence that governors "dominate" protesters.

On Monday, Baker said people attending the protests were still largely going with people they know and suggested it shouldn't hamper contact tracing efforts too badly.

The governor on Wednesday thanked those who have been demonstrating peacefully, and who wore masks while doing so, and credited members of law enforcement who worked to give people a safe space to make their voices heard.

"The country needs empathy not hostility," Baker said. "The [country] needs to heal, not fracture. And here in the commonwealth we plan to continue to talk, listen and push progress forward."

The governor said he and Lt. Gov. Karyn Polito continue to talk with Black and Latinx elected officials, faith and community leaders and law enforcement about ways to "enhance transparency and accountability across the Massachusetts law enforcement system," including the idea of standards of conduct for police and the ability to strip a police officer's certification if those standards are violated.

The protests have sprung up throughout Massachusetts just as the state was appearing to make real progress in its fight against the spread of COVID-19, and it could be a couple of weeks before public health officials understand the full impact of these demonstrations on their ability to control the virus.

By then, Massachusetts could be well into Phase Two of the governor's reopening strategy, which will include both outdoor and indoor athletic facilities, though sporting activities will be severely limited to start.



“Any time there’s big gatherings with close quarters the potential for spread is real,” Gov. Charlie Baker said Wednesday, calling it a “balancing act” between public health and First Amendment rights. [Photo: Sam Doran/SHNS]

Outdoor fields, courts, pools and boating facilities could reopen as soon as next week for organized youth and adult sports, but Lt Gov. Karyn Polito said contact sports like basketball, baseball and soccer will be limited to no-contact drills and practices when Massachusetts moves into the next phase of its reopening.

Tennis matches, for instance, could resume, but a baseball tournament would still be off limits.

“I know how different time has been for many families that have children in sports used to spending time together on the sidelines, in the bleachers, cheering our kids on. It’s one of the greatest joys,” said Polito, who has two teenagers, active in sports. “It’s been even tougher for our kids that miss

their friends and their teammates and the togetherness they feel as they practice and enjoy their time competing in games and events that are a big part of their lives.”

New guidance released Wednesday from the administration on outdoor and indoor athletic activities also said that indoor sports facilities may reopen only for organized and supervised sports activities for youth under 18, and groups must be limited in size to 10 participants and games or scrimmages are still prohibited.

Multiple groups of players will be permitted to practice on a basketball court or field, but should stay 20 feet from the nearest group, according to the rules.

Fitness centers, yoga and spin studios, rock gyms, and other general fitness studios will remain closed in Phase Two, as will locker rooms and weight rooms.

The release of rules for youth and adult recreational sports comes as the Baker administration is preparing different sectors for their opportunity to reopen if and when the state moves into Phase Two.

Baker plans to make the announcement on Saturday whether the state is ready to move to that phase, which could begin as soon as Monday, but could also be pushed back later. The governor did, however, point to encouraging signs in Tuesday’s public health report with respect to the positive test rate and hospitalizations.

The percent of tests coming back positive for COVID-19 was about 6 percent on Tuesday, which is down from 27 percent in mid-April, and the 1,657 patients hospitalized with the disease is down by half over the past month.

“These positive trends in the public health data are the primary indicators of how COVID-19 is impacting our communities and will continue to determine how and when we

pursue measures associated with our reopening program,” Baker said.

The positive test rate was down to 5.1 percent on Wednesday and rolling seven-day average dipped below 6 percent, while hospitalizations were up slightly in the daily report by 27 patients.

Health and Human Services Secretary Marylou Sudders also said that for the first time on Wednesday the state will begin reporting the number of people who have recovered from COVID-19, which will give a better glimpse at how many people in Massachusetts might be currently infected with virus.

After not holding a press briefing on Tuesday, Baker was joined on Wednesday by Early Education and Care Commissioner Samantha Aigner-Treworgy to walk through some of the child care reopening protocols that were announced on Monday.

Housing and Economic Development Secretary Mike Kennealy also spoke about the new guidelines retailers will have to follow when they get to expand operations in Phase Two, and Sudders ran through some of the results of auditing done at the state’s nursing homes to measure their preparedness to deal with COVID-19.

For the first time in months on Wednesday, nursing homes, assisted living facilities and other long-term care settings were allowed to let in visitors for outdoor, pre-scheduled visits with residents and patients.

And Baker, who has talked frequently about the emotional challenge of not being able to see his father during this pandemic, said he will soon be availing himself of the new guidelines.

“I am going to go see my dad. Soon,” he said.

Online petition asks for on-duty New Bedford police officers to wear body-worn cameras

An anonymous person has started an online petition that asks the New Bedford Police Department to “require on-duty police officers to use body-worn cameras in New Bedford.” At the time of this writing, it has received 3,618 of the 5,000 signature goal.

To the New Bedford Police Department,

We demand change.

The people of New Bedford are devastated by and terrified of the ongoing examples of police-inflicted violence across the country. We ask the city of New Bedford to take an active role in creating a transparent justice system to protect our community. On-duty police officers should be required to use body-worn cameras at all times. We are asking you to publicize your stance on body-worn cameras and disclose if/how you plan to implement them.

According to the National Institute of Justice, the use of body-worn cameras is shown to:

1. Drastically decrease police-brutality.
2. Promote transparency and accountability in the police department.
3. Assess accuracy of the nature of events articulated by officers and community members.

4. Improve community relationships with law enforcement.

We are asking you to uphold the standard of service that is advertised on the New Bedford Police Department website. Your mission statement reads that New Bedford police officers are “Highly trained and dedicated professionals, serving our community with respect and empathy.” The empathy and respect we NEED is the acknowledgment that systematic racism is an urgent issue in law enforcement. We are asking you to do your part by holding New Bedford police officers accountable for enforcing the law with nothing but righteous intentions.

The petition can be read and signed [here](#).

Massachusetts Guardsman on inactive status amid probe into “inflammatory” Post

Colin A. Young

State House News Service

The Massachusetts National Guard said Tuesday that it has placed a soldier on inactive status and is investigating claims that he posted to social media that he “can’t wait to shoot” rioters.



Spence
10m ago



Fuck your riots. Bullshit ass motherfuckin shit

You're all stupid and I can't wait to shoot you
tomorrow night



Send a chat

On social media early Tuesday, an image began circulating that purported to be a screenshot of a Snapchat message posted by a member of Mass. National Guard in which the soldier allegedly wrote, "F-k your riots" followed by a series of expletives and then, "You're all stupid and I can't wait to shoot you tomorrow night."

Meet Spencer. A national guard member who will be deployed in Boston tonight. Watch out for Spencer. Spencer is from Saugus, MA and committed a crime by posting that Snapchat. pic.twitter.com/sIry9dVBAW

– Becca ???? (@becFernand3z) June 2, 2020

The Guard was busy Tuesday afternoon responding to other social media posts calling out the soldier. "The Massachusetts National Guard has taken immediate action to address a Soldier's inflammatory and divisive comments, and he has been placed on inactive status and will not serve in any capacity while this matter is under investigation," the Guard tweeted.

The Massachusetts National Guard has taken immediate action to address a Soldier's inflammatory and divisive comments, and he has been placed on inactive status and will not serve in any capacity while this matter is under investigation.

– Mass. National Guard (@TheNationsFirst) June 2, 2020

"The Massachusetts National Guard has a proven track record of fair and equitable service and takes pride in our diversity and inclusionary practices to support our residents in every community, and has no tolerance for this insensitive behavior." The National Guard, which has been activated for weeks to assist with COVID-19 response, was also deployed Sunday night to help quell unrest in downtown Boston and remains on hand if needed.

Massachusetts politicians push back on Trump's military threat

Matt Murphy and Chris Lisinski
State House News Service

President Donald Trump on Monday said he wouldn't hesitate to deploy the military into American cities to forcefully quell violence, looting and vandalism if governors can't control the protests against police brutality occurring around the country. But the threat was met with resistance in Massachusetts, where the state's top law enforcement official described it as illegal and a "stupid thing to do."

Attorney General Maura Healey on Tuesday said that Trump "doesn't have the authority to say what he's going to do." And based on conversations with Massachusetts police, she's also worried that greater militarization will lead to more tension.

"We need to push for deescalation and a calming and restore a semblance of order," Healey said in a virtual appearance before the Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce. "We don't need soldiers in our streets."

Healey's comments came the morning after U.S. Sen. Edward Markey described Trump's Rose Garden remarks as "un-American," and U.S. Rep. Joseph Kennedy said a military response to the anger being displayed on the streets would not work.

Trump on Monday evening addressed the escalation of protests around the country in the wake of the alleged murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis. Floyd died while in police custody with

a police officer's knee on his neck.

"He will not have died in vain. But we cannot allow the righteous cries and peaceful protesters to be drowned out by an angry mob," Trump said. "The biggest victims of the rioting are peace-loving citizens in our poorest communities, and as their President, I will fight to keep them safe. I will fight to protect you. I am your President of law and order, and an ally of all peaceful protesters."

The president called for "healing, not hatred" and "justice, not chaos," but his promise to "end it now" with military force, if necessary, seemed to have the opposite effect of uniting the country.

Presumptive Democratic presidential nominee Joe Biden gave a speech in Philadelphia Tuesday morning pushing back on Trump's message, and Democrats in Massachusetts condemned his remarks.

Trump said he had urged governors to establish an "overwhelming law enforcement presence" to end the violence, and instituted a 7 p.m. curfew in Washington, D.C., where he also said he was "dispatching thousands and thousands of heavily armed soldiers, military personnel, and law enforcement officers."

"If a city or a state refuses to take the actions that are necessary to defend the life and property of their residents, then I will deploy the United States military and quickly solve the problem for them," Trump said.

The president made his comments from the Rose Garden at the White House just before Markey and Kennedy began a televised debate in Springfield in their Democratic primary race for Senate.

Markey said after the debate the president was "throwing fuel on an already raging fire."

"It would be the act of a dictator. It would be un-American. It would be an attempt by the president to further foment dissension in our country rather than bringing people together," Markey said.

U.S. Rep. Ayanna Pressley described Trump's intention to deploy the military to U.S. cities as "callous" and "disconnected." The Massachusetts Democrat said the president could have opened a dialogue with protestors to find out their needs.

"But instead, he perpetuated the violence," she said Tuesday at an event in front of the State House. "How do you have people in the streets peacefully protesting and demonstrating against excessive force and the militarization of our police force, and then you want to bring in tanks. It's nothing short of fascism."

Also after the debate on a Zoom call with reporters, Kennedy was asked whether Gov. Charlie Baker was right to call in the National Guard on Sunday night to help Boston police control the protests that had started peacefully, but had spiraled into violence and vandalism.

"The governor has to make sure that people are going to be protected here," Kennedy said. "What we also have to recognize is what is taking place in cities around the country, including in Boston, is a scream of anguish and desire for recognition."

"Drafting a military response to crush that anguish is not going to be successful," Kennedy finished.

Gov. Baker has not made a public appearance since Trump's Rose Garden remarks, but offered up harsh criticism of the president earlier in the day Monday after Trump told governors on a conference call that many of them were "weak" and needed to "dominate" the protesters.

Baker did not join that call.

"I know I should be surprised when I hear incendiary words like this from him, but I'm not," Baker said. "Like so many times during these past several weeks when the country needed compassion and leadership the most, it was simply nowhere to be found. Instead, we got bitterness, combativeness and self-interest."

Baker said he called in the National Guard to help get control of the protesting only in cooperation with city officials.

Healey condemned the alleged murder of Floyd, and said Americans must acknowledge "400 years of racism and oppression" that Black and brown people have faced. She said the heightened awareness created by widespread demonstrations should be used as an opportunity to build a new system "in ways that rid us of the institutionalized racism that's led to America burning today."

"Yes, America is burning, but that's how forests grow," Healey said.

MassGOP Chairman Jim Lyons, who has condemned both the protesters and what he has called the murder of Floyd, accused Healey of cheering on "rioters" and having "total disregard" for victims of the violent demonstrations.

"Massachusetts, this is your Democratic Party," Lyons Tweeted.