

Massachusetts Department of Public Health Calls for Tougher Action by Cannabis Industry to Improve Health and Safety After Work-related Asthma Death

The Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) today released an **investigative report** outlining additional steps the cannabis industry should take to prevent work-related asthma and sent a bulletin to health care providers in the Commonwealth urging vigilance in identifying work-related asthma among workers in that industry.

These steps were taken after an investigation conducted by DPH and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) confirmed that the first known occupational asthma fatality in the US cannabis workforce happened last year in Massachusetts. The bulletin reminds providers that they are mandated to report cases of work-related asthma and other respiratory diseases to DPH.

The investigation, which was highlighted in today's Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report, published by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, focused on the circumstances surrounding the death of a 27-year-old production technician who suffered a fatal asthma attack in January 2022 while at work at an indoor cannabis cultivation and processing facility in Massachusetts. The worker's death occurred seven months after she started employment at the facility and three months after she began working as a flower technician, which involved processing and handling whole and ground cannabis flower buds.

While this is the only known asthma death in the US cannabis industry, other cases of non-fatal respiratory disease among Massachusetts workers in that industry have been reported. Cannabis industry workers can be routinely exposed to various occupational respiratory hazards, including cannabis dust, mold, volatile organic compounds, pollen, bacterial endotoxins, pesticides, soil components, and cleaning disinfectants, which can cause and/or exacerbate chronic diseases, like asthma, if not addressed. Massachusetts has more than 500 licensed cannabis industry employers that provides jobs to 22,000 workers.

“The legalized cannabis industry in Massachusetts is relatively new and the impact on the health and safety of workers demands our careful attention,” said Public Health Commissioner Robert Goldstein, MD, PhD. “As this workforce continues to expand, it will require all of us working together – state and federal agencies, regulators, healthcare providers, and the cannabis industry – to improve working conditions for these employees. At DPH, we will continue to identify and follow up on these cases using our long-standing public health surveillance system for work-related respiratory disease and continue to work with our partners on documenting cases, building evidence around workplace hazards, and on intervention and policy.”

Work-related asthma – or asthma caused or exacerbated by exposures at work – is underrecognized in part because work-related asthma symptoms and industry and occupation data are not routinely collected as part of the physical exam or documented in the medical record, the bulletin to health care providers states.

Approximately 17 percent of new-onset adult asthma cases are related to workplace exposures. Regardless of the cause, an estimated 22-to-58 percent of adults with asthma nationwide suffer work-related exacerbations, according to the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH). In

Massachusetts, an estimated 200,000 adults have work-related asthma, data from DPH's Occupational Health Surveillance Program show.

Early recognition of work-related asthma can lead to both medical and workplace interventions that improve patient outcomes and mitigate exposure to the source.

In its bulletin, DPH urged health care providers to:

- Ask patients with new or worsening respiratory or allergic symptoms what they do for work and how it affects their health.
- Perform diagnostic testing, such as allergy testing, pulmonary imaging, and/or spirometry.
- Recommend workplace changes to avoid further exposure, as avoidance of workplace exposure is imperative.
- Report cases of work-related asthma and other work-related respiratory diseases to DPH, as required by law.

Employers also play a critical role in prevention.

The report on the investigation of the Massachusetts worker's death was prepared by DPH's Fatality Assessment and Control Evaluation (FACE) program, which conducts investigations on the causes of work-related fatalities. The report includes six recommendations for cannabis employers, equipment manufacturers, and the state's Cannabis Control Commission to improve the health and safety of cannabis industry workers.

"This investigation, which is part of an ongoing collaboration between OSHA and DPH, has identified cannabis dust as an occupational allergen with the potential to cause fatal occupational asthma," said Virginia Weaver, MD, MPH, Lead Physician, OSHA Occupational Medicine Resident Elective. "The case indicates the importance of identifying allergens in the workplace as early as possible and the need for experienced healthcare providers to manage workers who develop occupational allergies."

To improve worker safety, the investigative report recommended that:

- Employers should assess and control hazardous materials in the workplace, including asthmagens.
- Employers should ensure that all workers are properly trained about hazardous materials in the workplace.
- Employers should develop and implement a comprehensive safety and health program that addresses hazard recognition, avoidance of unsafe conditions, and proper use of equipment.
- Employers should implement a medical surveillance program to monitor the health of their workers.
- Equipment manufacturers should adopt and implement the concept of Prevention through Design (PtD) to identify potential hazards associated with equipment and then eliminate these hazards through design changes.
- Industry licensing agencies in Massachusetts should consider how they can further support the health and safety of cannabis industry workers.

“Levels of exposure to cannabis dust at work are much higher than what is present during recreational use,” said Emily Sparer-Fine, Director of DPH’s Occupational Health Surveillance Program. “Work processes that include grinding and concentrating an allergen need to be better controlled. It is critical for employers to assess and control exposure to hazardous materials, including the respiratory hazards found in the cannabis processing facilities, such as cannabis dust.”

Employers should utilize the Commonwealth’s Department of Labor Standards’ free and confidential On-Site Consultation service designed to help them recognize and control possible safety and health hazards at their worksites and establish and improve safety and health programs. The goal of the service is to prevent injuries and illnesses that are the result of hazardous workplace conditions and practices.

New Bedford City Council meetings, several key Committee meetings will now be streamed live

“The New Bedford City Council is pleased to announce the live streaming of regular City Council Meetings and several key Committee Meetings. After several successful ‘test’ runs, the City Council is officially making the public aware that the meetings can now be viewed live on the City’s website.

Key features of the live stream include high-definition video and sound, corresponding agendas which enable viewers to follow along as meetings progress, and the ability to view past meetings in the Archive section.

Meetings that will be live-streamed are as follows:

- All Regular & Special Meetings of the full City Council
- Special Committee on Affordable Housing & Homeless Affairs
- Committee on Appointments & Briefings
- Committee on Cannabis Regulation & Host Community Agreements Review
- Committee on City Property
- Committee on Environmental Affairs
- Committee on Ordinances
- Committee on Public Safety & Neighborhoods
- Committee on Veterans’ Affairs, Elderly, Youth, Health & Housing & Disability Issues

“As a body committed to representing each and every member of our City, my colleagues and I are pleased that our proceedings

and deliberations will now be accessible to the public without delay,” said City Council President Linda Morad. “This is an objective we have been working toward for quite some time now. After some technical challenges we are grateful for the efforts of the City MIS Department, New Bedford Cable Access and our Team in the City Council Office in bringing this important goal to fruition. We encourage the citizenry of New Bedford to view the City Council and Council Committee meetings via the live stream to stay informed on important City issues.”

The live stream can vbe found on the City of New Bedford’s Home Page, by clicking on ‘Meetings” under the ‘Quicklinks’ headings, or by using the following link: <https://www.newbedfordma.gov/meetings/>. Live meetings can be viewed while in progress, while past meetings are available by clicking on ‘Archives.’

For additional information, please contact City Clerk Dennis W. Farias at 508.979.1449.”-City of New Bedford.

All Five New Bedford state reps vote against one-year residency requirement to receive Right to Shelter benefits

Late last week, New Bedford State Representatives Tony Cabral (D), Christopher Markey (D), William Straus, Paul Schmid (D) and Christopher Hendricks (D) voted against an amendment that

would have required people prove they have lived in Massachusetts for at least a year before receiving benefits under the state's Right to Shelter Law. On a mostly party vote, the amendment was rejected 28-128.

Currently, the Right to Shelter Law in Massachusetts guarantees shelter for homeless parents with young children and pregnant women which has included newly arrived migrant families. The Shelter Law doesn't provide shelter for homeless individuals without children. Earlier this month, Governor Healey announced that the emergency shelter system is full and can't take any more families. This means Massachusetts families go on a waitlist even as temperatures drop to dangerous levels. Due to Massachusetts receiving twice as many migrants as last year the cost to house people in the emergency shelter system has spiked to \$40 million a month and the state legislators just approved another \$250 million to keep the system operational through the winter.

Newly arrived migrants, many in the country illegally, now received health care, housing and soon food benefits under SNAP program. Yesterday, Governor Healey announced that her administration has gotten 1,200 migrants work authorization permits.

OPINION: “College students unable to pay for food is not a new phenomenon!”

The following is an opinion sent to New Bedford Guide. It does not reflect the opinion of New Bedford Guide, nor is it an OP-ED. In fairness and objectivity, we share opinions from our

readers whether we agree or disagree with their opinion.

Do you have a counter opinion to this opinion? Have an opinion about something else? Email us at info@newbedfordguide.com.

"Reading articles about college students who are unable to pay for food brings to mind the tribulations of one of my dearest deceased friends. Always protective of her privacy I shall honor her without disclosing her name.

As often happens between close and caring friends she shared the details of her college days at the University of Massachusetts, in Amherst, where she obtained her several degrees. She was from a Cape Verdean working class family whose mother died when she was ten years old, leaving her father to support his children on one income.

From age ten until she qualified to attend the university she worked, after school hours and during the summers, cleaning houses, cranberry bogging, tending to her younger siblings and dealing with racial bigotry.

Also from an early age she showed an incredible scholastic ability and obtained outstanding grades enabling an easy entry into the university.

Despite all adversity and lack of monetary assistance she made it through her four years, but not without difficulty nourishing herself on weekends when her school dining card didn't cover meals. In order to eat on the weekends she would take extra boxes of cereal during the week to have something to tide her over until Monday mornings.

I now wonder how many students who can barely cover their tuition, housing and book expenses, are forced to find ways to nourish themselves sufficiently to pursue their studies and dreams.

My friend withstood so many obstacles but she ultimately, with advanced degrees and an abiding concern for struggling students, devoted her career to academia, accumulating honor, respect and most importantly appreciation from hundreds of students.

How many people who have the potential to contribute significantly to our society are denied access to higher education due to the outrageous cost of a college education? And even if the costs for their studies are covered through scholarships or loans, clearly food insecurity ultimately defeats their aspirations.”-Betty Ussach, Dartmouth.

Massachusetts woman caught on camera stealing ballots, allegedly committing voter fraud

In a shocking video out of Lawrence, Massachusetts, a woman is seen allegedly stealing ballots out of a mans mailbox. The man who does not want to be identified stated he went to vote in last week’s local election, and was told that he already voted.

This made him check his home security footage which resulted in him finding a woman walk onto his front porch and take ballots out of his mailbox.

This is one of two reports of potential voting fraud/stolen ballots in Lawrence Massachusetts this past election, with the Essex County District Attorney’s office telling NBC 10 Boston,

““There may be more. It’s premature to say how many,”.

This is especially alarming with a presidential election in less than one year. The last thing we need in our country is more distrust in the voting system.

Massachusetts will switch to “4-day work weeks” with new bill on Beacon Hill

In a newly proposed program called the “Massachusetts Smart Work Week Pilot”, Massachusetts workers will switch over to 4-day work weeks with no decrease in pay. Companies that reduce work hours for at least 15 employees, without giving them a pay cut will receive a tax credit.

This aims to not only reduce employee “burnout” but make Massachusetts a more desirable location for talented individuals seeking a job.

The beginning of the proposed bill (Bill H.3849) reads,

“Notwithstanding any general or special law to the contrary, the executive office of labor and workforce development shall establish a pilot program to promote, incentivize and support the use of a four-day work week by qualifying employers and to study the benefits and impacts of such work arrangements on participating employees and employers. This program shall be known as the Massachusetts Smart Work Week Pilot.

(b) For the purposes of this act, the following terms shall have the following meanings, unless the context clearly

requires otherwise:-

“Four-day work week”, employees receive a meaningful reduction in actual work hours without any reduction in overall pay.

“Pilot”, the Massachusetts Smart Work Week Pilot Program, as established in this act.

“Qualifying employer”, an employer operating in the commonwealth that enters an agreement to participate in the Massachusetts Smart Work Week Pilot Program subject to this act.”

So the question is, if your job switches over to a 4-day work week, do you think you will be less stressed and more productive? This seems like it could be a win-win for companies and employees. If you would like to read the bill yourself, [CLICK HERE](#).

Massachusetts town shows support for Palestine by flying PLO flag with American, POW-MIA flags

As of Tuesday, the Palestinian Liberation Organization's black, white, green and red flag is now flying with the POW-MIA and American flag on the town common flagpole of North Andover, Massachusetts.

The decision was made despite a month of protests and resistance from residents.

The idea was initially brought to town officials by Selma Khayal, a college student, on October 16th, after she raised the Israeli Flag on the common flagpole. Her petition made it in the nick of time before the town officially updated their flag-flying policies. Previously, the town looked at the flagpole as a “public” forum therefore anyone could petition to have any flag raised after approval by the Select Board.



The updated policy removed the wording around the idea of the flagpole being a “public forum” and replaced it with wording that the flagpole could only be used for statements of governmental speech.

“I can’t believe that my town has approved the petition to fly the Palestinian flag over our beautiful common!” said Richard Misci. “Our town council should be ashamed of their decision! What is happening to our country?!”

During a public meeting at North Andover High School on Monday about the raising of the PLO flag, residents got heated and discussion devolved into yelling and screaming at each other. As would be expected, numerous Jewish residents and a Ranni

showed up to make the case for the PLO's flag to be a symbol for Hamas, terrorism and anti-Semitism.

Police have been called to the Town Common several times since the flag was raised forcing the Department of Public Works to move the knot at the cleat high enough above that it couldn't be reached by anyone.

Town officials state that the flag will fly through December 6.



Massachusetts shelters officially at capacity as migrants forced to “join a waitlist”

Massachusetts has officially reached its capacity at emergency shelters to house migrants in the state. As of Friday morning, the “Emergency Assistance Placement Data” government website shows Massachusetts currently has 7,517 families enrolled and 37 families have enrolled in the past 24 hours. Capacity in Massachusetts is 7,500 families.

Emergency Assistant Director Gen. Scott Rice recently announced that once the system hits the 7,500 capacity, “Families eligible for emergency assistance will be placed on a waitlist”.

Massachusetts Governor, Maura Healey stated, “We will continue to provide resources to families. Food, clothing, access to information about alternative shelter options. So, that will all continue”.

It appears that more taxpayer money will be thrown at this issue as the House Pours \$250 Million More Into Massachusetts Shelter Crisis. Of greatest note is the House requirement that \$50 million of the \$250 million to go toward, “The identification, acquisition and operationalization of a state funded overflow emergency shelter site or sites” for families placed on a shelter waitlist.

House Pours \$250 Million More Into Massachusetts Shelter Crisis

The House made the first legislative foray into the state's slow-burning emergency shelter system crisis Wednesday, approving \$250 million and a list of specific requirements for the Healey administration as part of a larger budget bill that also addresses a slew of Beacon Hill loose ends and completes the accounting for the budget year that ended in June.

The long-awaited supplemental budget bill was adopted after little debate on a roll call vote of 133-25 just before 6 p.m. Senate leaders said that branch will take up its own version of the bill in "short order," and then House and Senate Democrats will have to iron out any differences before sending a final version to Gov. Maura Healey's desk.

"This \$2.8 billion supplemental budget will close the books on the fiscal year 2023. With a net cost to the commonwealth of \$1.69 billion, this legislation will allow us to end FY23 in a balanced and fiscally responsible manner. A majority of the items contained in here are deficiencies that we need to pay or reauthorizations of past appropriations," House Ways and Means Chairman Aaron Michlewitz said. "But the area that has received the most attention over the past few weeks is the request from the governor to make further appropriations to our emergency family shelter system."

The House bill (H 4167) would authorize the \$250 million infusion into the shelter system that Healey requested nearly two months ago, before the governor announced that she was capping the emergency shelter system at 7,500 families.

The House bill establishes requirements on how the additional appropriation can be used.

"We are proposing to provide the governor with her request of \$250 million, but it is no blank check," Michlewitz said.

Of greatest note is the House requirement that \$50 million of the \$250 million to go toward "the identification, acquisition and operationalization of a state funded overflow emergency shelter site or sites" for families placed on a shelter waitlist.

Out of the remaining \$200 million for emergency assistance shelters, the House bill would direct \$75 million toward reimbursing school districts for the costs of enrolling new students who recently arrived, \$18 million for temporary shelters, \$12 million for clinical and wraparound services, \$10 million for resettlement agencies, \$6 million for municipal support, \$6 million for shelter staffing needs, \$5 million for workforce authorization programming and \$3 million for family welcome centers, according to a bill summary.

"While we wait for Washington to get its act together, we must confront the issues that are on the ground. And that is a shelter system that is being asked to house significantly more families than it was designed for," Michlewitz said.

He added, "Our municipalities and school districts are taking the brunt of the day-to-day life of housing these families and providing children with the education and the needs that come with that. And that has left us in the Legislature, as well as many in the public, struggling to get answers on what is going on each and every day in our own communities. Despite these questions and frustrations, we have always provided the resources needed to manage the crisis."

The House budget chief said he expects the \$250 million outlay will get the state's shelter system through the next winter months and into the spring. An initial \$325 million allocation for shelter costs is expected to run out in January.

"To be clear," he said, "we face some hard decisions and

choices ahead for 2024 and beyond.”

During his introductory speech on the House floor Wednesday, Michlewitz asked fellow representatives to center their debate “around the facts that are before us today, and not misinformation that has casually been thrown around recently.”

“These families who have come to the commonwealth are [legally] here while their asylum process is underway,” he said.

Debate was fairly limited Wednesday afternoon. After Michlewitz’s intro, the House went into a lengthy recess as leadership chose which of the 61 amendments would be adopted as part of two consolidated mega-amendments. The first of those bundles, made available after 4 p.m., dispensed with 36 amendments but did not necessarily incorporate them into the supplemental budget. The second consolidated took care of what was left.

Rep. Paul Frost put one of his amendments up for consideration on its own after it was slated to be rejected in the first consolidated package. The Auburn Republican’s amendment would require that a family or pregnant person live in Massachusetts for at least one year before becoming eligible for emergency shelter. It included exceptions for domestic violence situations, natural disasters and more.

“I think that’s a fair amount of time to say that you’ve been here, that you’ve been participating in the community and that if you do need emergency shelter, then you could have it,” Frost said. “And if you want to discuss or further amend or debate lowering that figure to six months or whatever, I’m willing to talk. But the fact is it can’t be 45 minutes, it can’t be a day, because it won’t stop. They’ll continue to come and be sent here. And it’s not their fault, I understand that. They’re going where they’re told, they’re going where other groups are sending them because they’re told they will

be taken care of.”

Rep. Alice Peisch of Wellesley argued against Frost’s amendment, telling representatives that she does not think it would survive a court challenge or that it would actually staunch the flow of migrants to Massachusetts.

“I certainly appreciate the concern that gives rise to this amendment. However, the better approach, I believe, is that that has been proposed by the Ways and Means Committee with respect to requiring that the administration set up an overflow site or sites within 30 days and, if they do not, then the cap will not go into effect,” Peisch, the House’s assistant majority leader, said. “It seems to me that that is the better approach. And I think that that is one that we have put forward due to, unfortunately, the lack of clarity that we have been given to date by the administration with respect to what happens when families start to arrive once that 7,500-family cap has been reached.”

Frost’s amendment was rejected on a 28-126 vote that broke mostly along party lines. Democrat Reps. David Robertson of Tewksbury, Jonathan Zlotnik of Gardner and Colleen Garry of Dracut voted with the Republican caucus.

Though the shelter funding got the bulk of the attention, most of the money in the budget bill – about \$2.1 billion – would go toward MassHealth for “caseload adjustments.” It also includes nearly \$300 million for a reserve to fund collective bargaining agreements with state employees and \$10 million in additional flood relief for municipalities hit by severe rain events this summer.

House budget writers also picked up the loose ends of a July supplemental budget – including \$100 million for pension obligations related to an early retirement program, \$75 million for special education reimbursements and \$60 million for a DTA caseworker reserve – that didn’t already make it

across the finish line.

A House Ways and Means Committee spokesperson said the bill would authorize spending from both the state's general fund and a "transitional escrow fund" full of one-time relief dollars. The legislation empowers the administration to decide how much money to draw from each source, the spokesperson said.

House Speaker Ron Mariano previously said Michlewitz and Senate Ways and Means Committee Chairman Michael Rodrigues were negotiating the terms of the final supplemental budget before it emerged in either branch, but Michlewitz downplayed that notion this week.

"We had some discussions, but this is – I don't want to speak for the Senate. This is the House's version of what we think is the right step to be taken," he said of his private talks with Rodrigues.

Senate President Karen Spilka pledged Monday that her branch will take up the supplemental budget in "short order" following discussions with lawmakers. There's no Senate formal session scheduled this week, though Senate Democrats plan to meet in a closed-door caucus on Thursday morning.

Both branches must conclude formal lawmaking sessions for the year by Nov. 15 under legislative rules, though the possibility exists that the supplemental budget could move during informal sessions that any single member could derail.

New Bedford gets the lowest voter turnout ever recorded in city history in 2023 Municipal Election

New Bedford saw a 13.15% voter turnout this Tuesday for the 2023 Municipal Election. Although this is up from a 6% turnout in the preliminaries, it is down from the 2019 Municipal Election, and well, every other election ever recorded beforehand.

The New Bedford voting statistics on the election commission website date back to 1979, and it appears the farther back in history you go, the more people voted. New Bedford was once home to competitive Mayoral races with high voter turnouts.

In 1985 John Bullard (16,337 votes) defeated Brian Lawler (15,377 votes) in a tight race which saw a whopping 75% voter turnout. Back in the day, voter turnout above 50% was just your average election. In 1979 we saw 72%, 1991 saw 68%, but as time went on, New Bedford residents began to vote less and less.

2023 marks Mayor Mitchell's sixth victorious election and he will go on to serve as mayor for another four years. The highest voter turnout of the six elections involving Mayor Mitchell was the 2011 Municipal Election where 37.8% of voters casted a ballot in a race between Jon Mitchell and Tony Cabral.

What is mind boggling is there was a higher voter turnout in 2013 (18.6%) when Mitchell ran unopposed, than in the 2023 election when there was actually competition.

I can't offer any valid explanation as to why New Bedford

residents are progressively caring less and less in local elections, but I do know there is no shortage of people complaining about the city on the internet.

Interested in looking at New Bedfords voting history yourself?
[CLICK HERE.](#)