

Massachusetts Gov. Baker announces \$1.5 Million in grants to support 2021 “Summer Nights” initiative

Building on efforts to provide young people in urban communities across the Commonwealth with safe, fun recreational opportunities throughout the summer, the Baker-Polito Administration today announced the award of \$1.5 million in funding to support 55 programs at 80 locations through the 2021 Summer Nights Initiative. To celebrate the launch of the program, Governor Charlie Baker and Lieutenant Governor Karyn Polito joined Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA) Secretary Kathleen Theoharides, Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) Commissioner Jim Montgomery, local officials, and partner organizations at the Boys and Girls Club Family Center in the City of Springfield.

“Our administration is proud to kick-off another summer with Summer Nights, a program we launched in 2015 to provide children, teens, and young adults across the Commonwealth with the opportunity to join in on recreational and educational activities,” said Governor Charlie Baker. “Recognizing the tremendous success of this program, and the safe, inclusive, and fun events it provides for young people, we are pleased to significantly expand this program and its reach, allowing us to work with our partners to provide more programs in more communities throughout the summer.”

“Thanks to the Summer Nights program and our dedicated stakeholders, young people from around the state will have the chance to participate in fun and unique programming created with their interests in mind,” said Lieutenant Governor Karyn

Polito. "We are pleased to build on the success of our Summer Nights initiative, and look forward to working with our partner organizations to offer these fun, engaging activities in more cities and towns across the Commonwealth."

Through a significant increase in funding, the Administration has expanded the Summer Nights Initiative to support 55 organizations serving nearly 80 locations, after offering programs in 20 locations in 2019. Communities that will benefit from Summer Nights programming include the neighborhoods of Dorchester, Hyde Park, Jamaica Plain, Mattapan, Roxbury, and the South End in the City of Boston, as well as Brockton, New Bedford, Lowell, Lawrence, Springfield, and Worcester. Additionally, Summer Nights will support programs in seven new communities, including Cambridge, Holyoke, Lynn, Methuen, Randolph, Stoughton, and Taunton.

Grant funding will support the development of fun, engaging recreational, educational, cultural, and artistic programs for kids, teens, and young adults, providing an opportunity to learn new skills and socialize with peers. As part of this year's programming, Boston Harbor Now will provide free Ferry passes to Summer Nights participants and families to explore the Boston Harbor Islands.

Summer Nights, which begins on Wednesday, will run through August 20, 2021 and offer activities such as basketball skills, drills and tournaments, volleyball, yoga, dance, martial arts, flag football, corn-hole, dance, fishing, ping-pong, cardio boxing, afro beat dance, swimming, cooking, painting, gardening, dodgeball, tennis and nature exploration. Programming also includes sessions on leadership skill building, social justice, poetry, academic tutoring, storytelling, animation, entrepreneurism, music, media production, open mic nights, and career and college readiness programs. For a full list of programming, please visit the DCR's Summer Nights webpage.

“For the 7th year in a row, the Summer Nights program will provide wonderful opportunities for young people to turn off their screens and experience fun, educational, and hands-on programs that let them interact with their peers and learn new skills,” said Energy and Environmental Affairs Secretary Kathleen Theoharides. “As we continue to emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic, it is important to have access to safe, fun opportunities to play and socialize, and we’re proud to expand this program and work with our partners to reach more kids, teens, and young adults in more communities across the Commonwealth.”

“This year, DCR Summer Nights will feature a record number of partner organizations set to offer more than 1,200 events over a six-week period,” said Department of Conservation and Recreation Commissioner Jim Montgomery. “It is DCR’s honor to put on this key summer program and offer young people more opportunities to explore their favorite DCR facility or try their hand at a new skill.”

Since 2015, the Baker-Polito Administration has invested in the expansion of recreational opportunities across Massachusetts through the Summer Nights program, including new programming and extended operating hours at several DCR aquatic facilities in urban communities. An additional kick-off celebration will be held on Wednesday, July 13, 2021 at DCR’s Ryan Playground in City of Boston neighborhood of Mattapan.

Today’s launch in Springfield and next week’s event in Mattapan will feature a COVID-19 Mobile Vaccine Clinic available for those that are interested and 12 years of age or older. The Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) is coordinating with select Summer Nights partners to offer vaccine education and/or the mobile vaccine clinic at certain Summer Nights programs throughout July and August. A schedule for the Mobile Vaccine Clinic will be available on the Summer Nights webpage in the coming days.

Ahead of the Summer Nights Program launch, DCR invested \$350,000 to support improvements to hard courts at the Ryan Playground in Boston. The agency paved and color-coated the court, installed new tennis net posts, and adjusted basketball hoops. The construction started on June 7, 2021 and is scheduled to conclude on July 10, 2021. Additionally, DCR has invested \$200,000 over the past five years to repair and upgrade the playground.

“I want to thank Governor Baker, Lt. Governor Polito, Secretary Theoharides and Commissioner Montgomery for their continued support and partnership,” said Springfield Mayor Domenic Sarno. “The DCR Summer Nights program is a positive and successful program for our youth that not only provides fun activities but mentoring, coaching and the teaching of life skills. I want to thank Executive Director Keshawn Dodds and everyone at the Springfield Boys and Girls Club Family Center and all of our local partner organizations and agencies for their continued dedicated efforts in support of our children and their families. I know first-hand from my old days as Executive Director of the South End Community Center that these proactive youth development initiatives make a positive difference.”

This summer, DCR is offering free Learn to Swim programs at 12 locations statewide. Lessons began on Monday, July 5, 2021 in three two-week sessions for people of all ages. For information about lessons, please visit the agency’s website and call your local facility. Additionally, many YMCAs across the Commonwealth offer swimming lessons for children, teens and adults. If you live in the Boston area, view the list of YMCA Boston swim classes. If you live outside Boston, please visit the Alliance of Massachusetts YMCAs’ “Find Your Y” website to locate a YMCA near you. Furthermore, the American Red Cross offers swimming lessons for children, teens and adults at several of its locations in Massachusetts, as well. The Red Cross also offers a wide selection of CPR/AED, first

aid, lifeguarding, swimming and water safety, caregiving, disaster response, and emergency preparedness training. Visit the Red Cross for the “Learn to Swim” provider list and select Massachusetts for more information.

In June, DCR announced that it has increased lifeguard pay from \$17/hour, or \$18/hour for head guards, to \$20/hour and \$21/hour. Lifeguards who remain committed for the entire season with DCR will also receive a \$500 bonus at the end of the season. DCR continues to actively recruit individuals to become a lifeguard at its inland and coastal waterfronts, and deep water swimming pools in the Boston Region (including Cambridge and the surrounding towns), the North Region (specifically Saugus, Nahant, and East Boston), the South Region (specifically Sandwich and Westport), and the Central Region (Metro West to Worcester County). Interested individuals can apply online and are strongly encouraged to call Jim Esposito at (857) 214-0400 or visit the DCR’s lifeguarding webpage, application information, and lifeguard requirements can be found.