

No COVID-19 deaths in Boston over past week, but city sees 12 shootings in 3 days

By Katie Lannan

State House News Service

Boston has gone a week without a COVID-19 death, marking what Mayor Martin Walsh described on Tuesday as a “very encouraging” span.

Walsh said 25 new cases of the coronavirus logged Tuesday brought the city’s cumulative caseload to 15,967 since the onset of the pandemic, and its death toll has held steady at 754 since last week.

Statewide, there have been 121,214 total test-confirmed cases and 9,141 deaths among people with confirmed or probable COVID-19 cases, according to the Department of Public Health.

In an afternoon press conference outside City Hall, Walsh discussed Boston’s COVID-19 metrics and the dozen shootings that city police responded to over the holiday weekend.

After “a couple of weeks of decline,” the city’s positive test rate stands at 1.7 percent, Walsh said. East Boston continues to have the highest positive rate of any neighborhood in the capital city, at 8.7 percent as of Sept. 1. That number is down from 11.4 percent three weeks ago.

“That’s a good way to see the numbers go,” Walsh said. “We want to continue that downward trajectory, if you will, over in East Boston, with testing.”

Walsh said city officials launched an “elevated outreach plan” three weeks ago, targeting East Boston with efforts like the distribution of kits with cleaning supplies and virus

information, partnerships with churches, and messaging for people in multi-generational households about strategies they can use to limit transmission.

12 Shootings in 3 Days

Separately, Walsh and Police Commissioner Willie Gross said Boston city departments and other agencies convened ahead of the Labor Day holiday to plan violence prevention and response efforts. Walsh said some sort of violence “is not unusual for Labor Day weekend” – though he said any act of violence, at any time, is unacceptable – and Gross characterized the weekend as a long one, with 12 unrelated shootings in the city.

“At this time, our investigations reveal that none of the twelve shootings are connected,” Gross said.

Gross thanked residents whose 911 calls helped police make gun arrests or “facilitate investigations.”

“It was a long weekend,” he said. “Instead of being hyper-critical, for some folks, get out there and talk to your constituency, because a lot of the kids that are involved in the shootings or in drag-racing or fireworks are part of your constituency. The police can’t wear all the hats. We need everyone to do their jobs, not point figures.”

Gross said he welcomes an eventual full reopening of the court system, which like many entities had to rethink its operations to accommodate the realities of the COVID-19 pandemic.

“We definitely welcome the courts to reopen. There’s the COVID-19 situation that prevents them from doing so, but whether it’s virtually or until that time, we need the courts to be open, because these individuals causing violence in our neighborhoods should be locked up,” Gross said. “That’s why you have twelve shootings within three days. There has to be some accountability.”

Like other parts of the state's court system, Boston Municipal Court and Suffolk Superior Court are open for in-person proceedings on a limited basis with health and safety protocols in place, with other matters conducted virtually. Jury trials originally scheduled to start between March 14 and Sept. 4 were ordered to be continued to dates no earlier than Tuesday, Sept. 8, and no new grand jury could be empaneled before Tuesday unless ordered by the Supreme Judicial Court.

Walsh said that while courts are open, some are operating in modes that are "not as full as they have been." He said it is important to "send a very strong message that if you do something bad in the city, that you will be brought to court and prosecuted by the appropriate authority."