Dear Legislator:

We ask for your support for adequate funding for public health programs in the FY16 budget. The Department of Public Health (DPH) provides protections that we all rely on every day, though we seldom pause to think about these important safeguards – things like indoor air quality in our schools, protection of our food supply, and a fast response to infectious disease to avoid outbreaks. Programs at DPH and across state government that support healthy eating, violence prevention, and access to safe, affordable housing represent cost-effective approaches to support healthy communities, reduce health care costs, and promote equity for all Massachusetts residents. We ask for your support for the following funding priorities:

**ESSENTIAL PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICES**

- **State Public Health Laboratory (4516-1000) – fund at $14,498,230** (maintenance funding). The State Public Health Lab is crucial to the health of Massachusetts residents and supports local health departments in every city and town. The Lab is responsible for the testing of samples for influenza, tuberculosis, salmonella, lead poisoning, bioterror agents, and insect-borne diseases like EEE and West Nile Virus; monitoring of disease reporting by physicians, hospitals, and laboratories; investigation of and response to disease outbreaks; and helping local health departments respond to communicable disease threats. *Funding history: FY09: $17.38m; FY15: $14.15m (reduced additional $1m in 9C cuts); FY16 H1: $12.89m.*

- **Environmental Health Services (4510-0600) – fund at $4,697,546** (maintenance funding). The Bureau of Environmental Health safeguards many of the most basic structures we rely on daily—protecting all Massachusetts residents from hazardous exposures and environmentally-induced illness. The Bureau includes food safety, radiation control, water and air quality testing, and medical waste disposal, among others. Proposed House 1 cuts would result in the loss of 8 FTE inspector positions, posing a threat to health and safety. *Funding history: FY09: $4.60m; FY15: $4.43m; FY16 H1: $4.23m.*

- **DPH Critical Operations and Essential Services (4510-0100) – fund at $20,146,896** (maintenance funding). This line item supports critical DPH services and staff across the Department, including emergency preparedness, environmental health assessments, implementation and enforcement of regulations, reducing disparities in health care, and monitoring and inspections of nursing homes, food safety, and water quality. Proposed House 1 cuts would result in the loss of 20 FTEs. *Funding history: FY09: $24.33m; FY15: $20.06m (reduced additional $401K in 9C cuts); FY16 H1: $18.94m.*

**CHRONIC DISEASE PREVENTION AND HEALTHY EATING**

- **Mass in Motion (dedicate within 4513-1111) – fund at $250,000** (level funding). The Mass in Motion program, currently covering more than 60 cities and towns, is the state’s signature community-based obesity prevention initiative and has become a national model for improving community health. Mass in Motion communities are increasing access to healthy foods and opportunities for play and physical activity, creating smoke-free housing units, and leading quality improvement activities at community health centers. *Funding history: FY15: $250K; FY16 H1: $0.*
Mass. Food Trust Program (dedicate within 7007-0300) - fund at $2,500,000 (new funding). Too many Massachusetts communities have poor access to healthy food and lack strong local job opportunities. The Massachusetts Food Trust Program, established in law in 2014, would provide loans, grants, and technical assistance to support new and expanded healthy food retailers and local food enterprises in low and moderate income communities. Better access to healthy food can create jobs and drive economic growth. Dedicated appropriations are needed to implement this program.

VIOLENCE PREVENTION

- Youth Violence Prevention (4590-1506) – fund at $1,334,449 (maintenance funding). Funding supports community-based programs that serve low-income youth and youth living in communities heavily impacted by violence and substance abuse to build their confidence, self-efficacy, and leadership. Youth violence continues to grow in Massachusetts, diminishing the mental and physical health of young people and contributing to a loss of lives. Funded programs provide mentoring, leadership development, and job training and have been shown to deter violence. Funding History: FY09: $3.89m; FY15: $1.33m; FY16 H1: $1.33m.

- Youth at Risk Grants (4590-1507) – fund at $4,150,000 (level funding). Funding supports community-based programs that target high-risk youth including those already involved in violence, victims of violence, and vulnerable groups such as LGBTQ and homeless youth to intervene in the cycle of violence and to create greater opportunity. Funded programs provide services such as gang intervention, job readiness, counseling, and academic assistance, which have been shown to positively intervene in the cycle of violence, improving the health and safety of young people. Funding History: FY15: $4.15m; FY16 H1: $4.15m.

- Sexual and Domestic Violence Prevention and Services (4513-1130) – fund at $7,500,000 (increase over FY15). Funding supports rape crisis centers, batterer intervention programs, and domestic/sexual violence services. In Massachusetts, nearly 1 in 3 women and 1 in 5 men experience rape, physical violence or stalking by an intimate partner. Rape Crisis Centers provide much needed intervention, advocacy, support groups and outreach. Additional funding is needed to increase the number of advocates, increase services, and to address sexual assault on campus. Funding History: FY09: $7.10m; FY15: $5.83m (reduced $70K in 9C cuts); FY16 H1: $5.76m.

HOUSING AND HEALTH

- Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program (7004-9024) – fund at $100,000,000 (increase over FY15). MRVP is the state’s rental assistance program; it helps low income families, the elderly and persons with disabilities pay their rent in private apartments at a significantly lower cost than emergency shelter. Access to stable, affordable housing is essential to good health and preventing homelessness. Funding History: FY09: $30.55m; FY15: $64.23m; FY16 H1: $75.42m.

We thank you for your partnership to support a healthy Commonwealth. For more information about any of these priorities, please contact Maddie Ribble at 617-697-2107 or mribble@mphaweb.org.

Sincerely,

Rebekah Gewirtz, Executive Director
Maddie Ribble, Director of Policy and Communications

*All FY09 figures adjusted for inflation