May 4, 2020

The Honorable Robert DeLeo
Speaker of the House
State House, Room 356
Boston, MA 02133

Dear Speaker DeLeo:

The Massachusetts Chapter of NAHRO (“MassNAHRO”) represents the 242 local housing authorities in the Commonwealth that own and operate 43,000 units of state-subsidized housing for the Commonwealth’s low-income veterans, seniors, families and people with disabilities. The Massachusetts Union of Public Housing Tenants (“Mass. Union”) represents the more than 70,000 public housing residents across the Commonwealth.

On behalf of both organizations, we are compelled to join together to express our grave concerns about the potential for deadly COVID-19 outbreaks in public housing communities across the commonwealth.

Two-thirds of the residents in public housing are seniors and people with disabilities who are at increased risk of contracting COVID 19. Many residents of public housing work in low-paid jobs providing essential services, with little or no personal protective equipment.

Residents live in close quarters and in some communities must navigate shared elevators and narrow hallways to leave their apartments to buy food, medicine and other necessities. Families with children out of school face daily challenges feeding, educating and keeping their kids safe.

Accordingly, we are requesting an emergency FY20 supplemental appropriation in the amount of $15 million – equal to approximately $300 per unit through the end of FY2020 – to provide all residents with masks, purchase protective gear and cleaning supplies for staff, and manage the additional costs associated with keeping public housing communities safe during the COVID-19 crisis. This request is also supported by Citizens Housing and Planning Association (CHAPA) and the Massachusetts Law Reform Institute (MLRI).

Massachusetts’ local housing authorities are doing their best with the resources they have to prevent the spread of the virus, keep residents informed, and maintain day-to-day operations. But public housing communities need more and better personal protective equipment, cleaning and sanitizing supplies, and funding for staff and supplies at this critical time. At the same time, local housing authorities are facing reduced rental income as rents are reduced for residents who have lost their jobs.

Nearly two months into this public health crisis, many local housing authorities are making do with the little they received from the Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency recently: a gallon of sanitizing solution, a box of gloves, a few travel-sized hand sanitizing bottles, and a handful of masks. Clearly, these meager supplies are inadequate to protect public housing residents against this unseen and deadly enemy.
Thank you for your consideration of this urgent request for critical resources to help sustain housing authorities through the end of FY2020, allowing us to continue to keep Massachusetts low-income residents safe.

Sincerely,

**Donna Brown-Rego**  
Donna M. Brown-Rego  
Executive Director  
Massachusetts Chapter of NAHRO

**John Cooper**  
John Cooper  
Executive Director  
Mass. Union of Public Housing Tenants