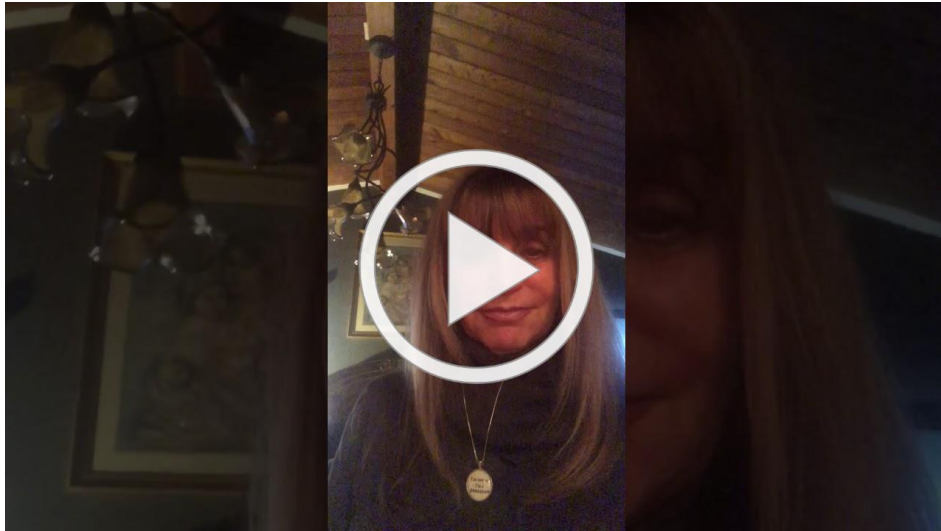




Update on resources available for disaster relief relating to COVID-19 for all Blackstone Valley Businesses

A message from the Blackstone Valley Chamber of Commerce President & CEO, Jeannie Hebert, to the businesses of the Blackstone Valley.



Thursday, March 19, 2020
COVID-19 Response Command Center
Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency

Situation Update

On March 10, 2020, Governor Charlie Baker declared a State of Emergency to support the Commonwealth's response to coronavirus. On March 14, the Baker-Polito Administration announced the creation of a new COVID-19 Response Command Center. Secretary Marylou Sudders is leading the cross-secretariat response to the outbreak.

The Command Center is the Commonwealth's single point of strategic decision making and coordination for the Administration's comprehensive COVID-19 response.

In support of the Command Center, the State Emergency Operations Center (SEOC) in Framingham has activated to Level 2 (Partial Activation). In addition, MEMA's Regional EOCs in Tewksbury, New Bedford, and Agawam have also been partially activated to support local communities. Representatives from the following agencies and organizations were present in the SEOC today: American Red Cross, Dept. of Environmental Protection, Dept. of Fire Services, FEMA, InfraGard, MA Dept. of Public Health, Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency, MA National Guard, MA Office on Disability, MA State Police, MassDOT/MBTA, Northwest Incident Management Team, and Salvation Army.

Important protective measures to be aware of:

- [Gatherings of over 25 people are prohibited](#) until April 6th.
- On-premises consumption of food and drink at bars and restaurants is prohibited until April 6th.
- Elementary and Secondary Schools are closed until April 6th.
- Colleges and universities, both public and private, are urged to reduce the need for students to be on campus.
- Employers are encouraged to support alternative work arrangements, including allowing employees to work from home.
- Some government offices are closed, you should check the website or call ahead, to confirm hours of operation.
- MBTA trains and buses are running a [reduced service schedule](#).
- Public & Private daycare providers will be closed effective March 23, and Exempt Emergency Child Care Programs will be established to provide priority access for families of emergency personnel, medical staff, and others critical to confronting COVID-19.
- Professional Licenses for individuals in good standing will be extended for 90-days after the end of the public health emergency.

See a list of all [Public Health Orders & Guidance](#) Issued During the State of Emergency



Situation in Numbers

Massachusetts current as of 3/19
328 Total Cases

2,208 patients tested to date by MA State Public Health Laboratory

924 additional tests performed to date by commercial laboratories

United States current as of 3/19

Total Cases Reported to CDC*:

** Includes Confirmed & Presumptive Positive*

10,442 Total Cases (+6,216)
290 Travel-Related (+21)
310 Close Contact (+34)
9,842 Under Investigation (+3,349)
150 Deaths (+53)

54 Jurisdictions Reporting Cases (50 states, D.C., Puerto Rico, Guam, and US V.I.)

Social Distancing Basics:

If you go out:

- ✓ Avoid crowds
- ✓ Stay 6 feet away from others
- ✓ Don't shake hands or hug
- ✓ Call/Facetime/online chat with friends and loved ones.

Webinar *TODAY!* Running Your Business in Quarantine. A Survival Guide

[Register for Webinar Here](#)



INTHINK
A GROWTH AGENCY

Common Concerns we will address:

- How will my business survive?
- How do I manage my team remotely?
- How do we communicate COVID-19 messaging to our clients?
- How do we humanize the virtual culture, sales, marketing and customer experience?
- What is going to be our new business

strategy?

We're all asking ourselves these questions, while navigating stressful and emotional decisions. InThink is here to help! Our team has been working around the clock to create and launch a weekly webinar series to help our community and businesses.

InThink Webinar Series

Running Your Business in Quarantine: A Survival Guide

Join CEO, Kham Inthirath, as he discusses how your business can strategically position itself in the wake of COVID-19. The first session is this **Friday, March 20th 2-3pm EST**. Other experts will join the conversation in the following weeks.

Webinar Agenda

- **The Importance of Marketing to Protect Your Business**
- **Best Practices + Tools**
 - Virtual Sales
 - Virtual Marketing
 - Virtual Operations
- **Rapid Response Business Plan + Why You Need One**
- **Q&A**

[REGISTER FOR THE WEBINAR HERE!](#)

If you can't wait until the webinar, book your complimentary 30-min advising session and see if a Rapid Response Business Plan is right for you. [Schedule here](#) or email us at help@inthinkagency.com.

We are a mix of national and local team members who have always been remote. We are here to serve as a resource for our community.

SBA Approves Massachusetts Disaster Declaration

Assistance Will be Provided to Massachusetts Businesses and Non-Profits Impacted by COVID-19

CHARLIE BAKER
Governor



KARYN POLITO
Lt. Governor



U.S. Small Business Administration

The Baker-Polito Administration announced today that the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) will offer low-interest federal disaster loans for working capital to Massachusetts small businesses suffering substantial economic injury as a result of the Coronavirus (COVID-19). The disaster declaration makes SBA assistance available

following a request received from Governor Charlie Baker on March 17, 2020.

The disaster declaration makes SBA assistance available in the entire state of Massachusetts; and the contiguous counties in neighboring states.

Small businesses, private non-profit organizations of any size, small agricultural cooperatives and small aquaculture enterprises that have been financially impacted as a direct result of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) since Jan. 31, 2020, may qualify for Economic Injury Disaster Loans of up to \$2 million to help meet financial obligations and operating expenses which could have been met had the disaster not occurred. Eligibility for Economic Injury Disaster Loans is based on the financial impact of the Coronavirus (COVID-19). The interest rate is 3.75 percent for small businesses. The interest rate for private non-profit organizations is 2.75 percent. SBA offers loans with long-term repayments in order to keep payments affordable, up to a maximum of 30 years, and are available to entities without the financial ability to offset the adverse impact without hardship.

Applicants may apply online, receive additional disaster assistance information and download applications at <https://disasterloan.sba.gov/ela>. Applicants may also call SBA's Customer Service Center at (800) 659-2955 or email disastercustomerservice@sba.gov for more information on SBA disaster assistance. Individuals who are deaf or hard-of-hearing may call (800) 877-8339. Completed applications should be mailed to U.S. Small Business Administration, Processing and Disbursement Center, 14925 Kingsport Road, Fort Worth, TX 76155.

The deadline to apply for an Economic Injury Disaster Loan is **Dec. 18, 2020**.

On March 16, 2020, the Baker-Polito Administration [announced a \\$10 Million Small Business Recovery Loan Fund](#), and the administration remains in ongoing discussions across state government and with federal partners to determine what resources can be made available to small businesses and non-profits as they contend with the negative effects of this public health emergency.

The administration will continue to update the public on further developments and individuals are encouraged to consult both the [Department of Public Health](#) and the US [Centers for Disease Control](#) and Prevention websites for the most up to date information.

The latest information and guidance regarding COVID-19 is always available at mass.gov/COVID19.

[How to Apply - Click Here for Webinar](#)

[Fact Sheet](#)

[News Release](#)

Emergency loans of up to \$20,000 to small businesses negatively impacted by Covid-19



The BVCC has for many years had a relationship with North Central Community Development Corporation (NCCDC) for gap and micro lending.

Sandie Cataldo is the Director, scataldo@northcentralmass.com. They are offering emergency loans of up to \$20,000 to small businesses negatively impacted by Covid-19.

- The loans, offered through its financing arm the North Central Massachusetts Development Corp. are in lieu of high-interest credit cards or expensive and unregulated online lenders.
- The NCCDC still offers its regular loans of up to \$150,000, although those take longer to approve.
- To qualify for the emergency loan, businesses must provide two years of tax returns and demonstrate a direct financial impact of coronavirus on the business.
- To inquire about a loan, please contact Sandie at the North Central Chamber.

Federal and state business-related legislation to help ease this economic hardship

FEDERAL

Emergency Family and Medical Leave Act

- The revised bill provides that private-sector employers with fewer than 500 employees, and covered public-sector employers, must provide up to 12 weeks of job-protected FMLA leave for “a qualifying need related to a public health emergency” to employees who have been on the payroll for 30 calendar days.
- This “qualifying need” is limited to circumstances where an employee is unable to work (or telework) due to a need to care for a minor child if the child’s school or place of child care has been closed or is unavailable due to a public health emergency.
- This is a dramatic scaling back from the prior iteration of the bill, which would have provided extended FMLA for a far broader range of COVID-19-related reasons.

To read a more in-depth explanation of the federal legislation passed Wednesday, please visit our [website](#). The bill, in its entirety, can be read [online](#).

COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS Administrative Tax Relief Measures

- This tax relief for small, local businesses includes postponing the collection of regular **sales tax, meals tax, and room occupancy taxes** that would be due in March, April, and May **postponing their due date to June 20**. Additionally, **all penalties** and interest that would otherwise apply **will be waived**.
- Businesses that paid less than \$150,000 in regular sales plus meals taxes in the year ending Feb. 29, 2020 will be eligible for relief for sales and meals taxes.
- Business that paid less than \$150,000 in room occupancy taxes in the year ending Feb. 29, 2020 will be eligible for relief with respect to room occupancy taxes.
- These administrative relief measures which are expected to be finalized before Friday, March 20, 2020.
- The state is providing **unemployment assistance** to workers impacted by COVID-19 by waiving the one-week waiting period for unemployment benefits allowing new claims to be paid more quickly.

USDA Grant Updates



Specialty Crop Block Grant Program - Submission Update

Due to COVID-19 and in compliance with State guidelines, **MDAR can only accept email submissions** for this year's SCBG applications.

The purpose of the Specialty Crop Block Grant Program (SCBGP) is to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops. Specialty crops are defined as "fruits, vegetables, tree nuts, dried fruits, horticulture, and nursery crops (including floriculture)." USDA specific definition of Specialty Crops is here.

Please send applications to Keri.Cornman@mass.gov by 5:00pm on April 3, 2020. *If USDA makes any adjustments to their timeline, MDAR will then adjust our submission date if needed.

MDAR will send a confirmation of receipt of your application. If you submit your application and do not receive a prompt confirmation, please contact [Keri Cornman](mailto:Keri.Cornman@mass.gov) or [Rebecca Davidson](mailto:Rebecca.Davidson@mass.gov).

Rebecca Davidson is available to answer questions or to provide technical assistance as you develop your proposal. Please contact her at Rebecca.Davidson@Mass.gov or 857-202-7699 with any questions.

USDA Announces \$37 Million in Grants Available to Local and Regional Food Systems

The U.S. Department of Agriculture Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) recently announced the availability of \$37 million in competitive grant funding under the 2018 Farm Bill's Local Agricultural Marketing Program (LAMP). These grants support the development, coordination and expansion of direct producer-to-consumer marketing, local and regional food markets and enterprises and value-added agricultural products.

There is \$27 million available through the Farmers Market and Local Food Promotion Program (FMLFPP) and \$10 million available through the newly established Regional Foods System Partnership (RFSP) program.

This is the first grant cycle for the RFSP. This program funds projects that connect public and private resources to plan and develop local or regional food systems with the goal of increasing access to and availability of locally and regionally produced agricultural products.

FMLFPP is administered in two components:

- Farmers Market Promotion Program (FMPP) funds projects that develop, coordinate and expand direct producer-to-consumer markets.
- Local Food Promotion Program (LFPP) funds projects that develop, coordinate and expand local and regional food business enterprises that engage as intermediaries in indirect producer-to-consumer marketing.

FMLFPP and RFSP require cost share or matching funds in an amount equal to 25 percent of the total federal portion of the grant. Additionally, applicants may use up to \$6,500 of the amount requested in their application for upgrades to equipment to improve food safety.

Applications must be submitted electronically through www.grants.gov. Eastern Time on the due dates established in the respective request for applications.

For more information about grant eligibility and previously funded projects, visit the AMS Grants webpage.

USDA Grant application Period is Now Open for Regional Food System Partnerships Program

USDA AMS The Regional Food System Partnerships (RFSP) program supports partnerships that connect public and private resources to plan and develop local or regional food systems. Effort is focused on building and strengthening local or regional food economy viability and resilience by alleviating unnecessary administrative and technical barriers for participating partners.

AMS is soliciting applications from eligible partnerships, which include at least one eligible entity and at least one eligible partner.

The 2020 RFSP grant application period is now open. The deadline for submitting applications for the 2020 Request for Applications is May 11, 2020 at 11:59 pm, Eastern time.

More information at www.ams.usda.gov/services/grants/rfsp.

MDAR's mission is to ensure the long-term viability of agriculture in Massachusetts. Through its four divisions – Agricultural Conservation & Technical Assistance, Agricultural Markets, Animal Health, and Crop and Pest Services – MDAR strives to support, regulate and enhance the rich diversity of the Commonwealth's agricultural community to promote economically and environmentally sound food safety and animal health measures, and fulfill agriculture's role in energy conservation and production. For more information, visit MDAR's website at www.mass.gov/agr.

Sales, Meals and Room Occupancy Tax Remittance Delay



Per yesterday's order from Governor Baker, the MA DOR is working on emergency regulations to immediately postpone the remittance of regular sales tax, meals tax, and room occupancy taxes, from certain small business filers, that would be due in March, April and May so that they will instead be due on June 20. Eligible businesses are those that paid less than \$150,000 in regular sales plus meals taxes in the year ending February 29, 2020, and business that paid less than \$150,000 in room

occupancy taxes in the year ending February 29, 2020.

For those eligible, this includes the taxes that you have previously collected but may have not yet remitted this month. DOR has advised us to inform members that they DO NOT have to file these taxes that would regularly be due tomorrow, March 20.

Additional guidance, including the emergency regulations, are expected to be released later today or early tomorrow. The relevant section from the order yesterday is also pasted below.

Baker-Polito Administration Makes New Announcements on Childcare, Small Business Tax Relief and Unemployment Insurance Legislation Related to COVID-19

Small Business Relief: The Baker-Polito Administration today announced administrative tax relief measures for small local businesses which have been impacted by the ongoing COVID-19 outbreak, especially in the restaurant and hospitality sectors. This tax relief includes postponing the collection of regular sales tax, meals tax, and room occupancy taxes that would be due in March, April and May so that

they will instead be due on June 20. Additionally, all penalties and interest that would otherwise apply will be waived.

- Businesses that paid less than \$150,000 in regular sales plus meals taxes in the year ending February 29, 2020 will be eligible for relief for sales and meals taxes, and business that paid less than \$150,000 in room occupancy taxes in the year ending February 29, 2020 will be eligible for relief with respect to room occupancy taxes.
- The Department of Revenue is currently drafting emergency regulations to implement these administrative relief measures, and they are expected to be finalized before Friday, March 20, 2020.

Clark University SBDC remote counseling available

The Blackstone Valley Chamber's **SBDC's Counselor**, **Leo Sharkey**, will be available for appointments via conference call. SBDC understands the hardship that small business owners may be experiencing due to this current COVID-19 situation. Please email LSharkey@clarku.edu to schedule your appointment.

Commonwealth State of Emergency - RMV Update

The Massachusetts RMV is taking an important step following Governor Charlie Baker's declaration of a State of Emergency the week of March 9th and to complement the work that has been underway for weeks across state government to keep residents safe and healthy.

Due to the recent activity surrounding COVID 19 (Corona Virus), the RMV is taking measures to reduce customer visits in our Service Centers and AAA offices. One of these actions includes extending the expiration date of certain credentials.

All Class D and Class DM driver's licenses, ID cards, and Learner's Permits that have expired or are expiring between March 1, 2020 and April 30, 2020, will have a 60-day extension applied to the current expiration date.

- This deadline extension will not apply to customers with Commercial Driver's Licenses (CDLs) or those whose end of stay in the United States is the same as the expiration date on their driver's license, ID card, or Learner's Permit.
- The RMV will implement this 60-day extension to the current expiration date for Class D, Class DMs, ID cards, and Learner's Permits within the RMV system the week of 3/16 – all people with expired/expiring credentials physically dated between March 1, 2020 and April 30, 2020, will have an active status within the RMV system with extended expiration date. For example, if the credential expires on April 15, 2020, the RMV system will extend the expiration to June 15, 2020 and display the same. The RMV is not providing updated credentials to reflect the extended date.
- This does not apply to vehicle registrations at this time. Most vehicle registrations can be renewed online at Mass.Gov/RMV.

Free Veteran Resources through PATRIOTlink

Veterans can search free resources through Code of Support's PATRIOTlink

<[Click Here](#)>

Code of Support's PATRIOTlink® platform is a free online resource database that includes thousands of programs tailored to the military and Veteran community.

Through PATRIOTlink, users can search vetted, direct, cost-free services specific to their needs.

LEARN MORE

<[Click Here](#)>

A Fun Break While Working From Home!

Jimmy Fallon launches 'Cowbell Challenge' today to honor first responders amid coronavirus



"Tonight Show" host [Jimmy Fallon](#) is launching the "Cowbell Challenge" amid the coronavirus pandemic, calling on Americans to unite at an agreed time on Friday, open their windows and make noise to support first responders and each other. Fallon, 45, said he wants everyone to take part on Friday [March 20] at 3 p.m. ET (12 p.m. PT), saying: "I want everyone to get out your cowbell, get out a pot and pan. 3pm – open your window or door – if you have a balcony, good for you!"

"Make some noise and tell this virus to get away from us, we don't want you. Let's make some noise. Cowbell challenge TODAY at

3pm!"

As a reminder, the BVCC Office is closed to in person meetings this week, but please do not hesitate to contact the staff of the Blackstone Valley Chamber of Commerce. We are here to ensure your questions get answered, and your business needs are met.

Remote contact info:

Jeannie Hebert President & CEO cell #: (508) 981 5782 jhebert@blackstonevalley.org

Liz O'Neil Programs and Events Coordinator loNeil@blackstonevalley.org

Julia Juskavitch Marketing Coordinator jjuskavitch@blackstonevalley.org

Marcia Decker and Judy Curtis Administration bvadmin@blackstonevalley.org
