



May 21, 2020

Councilor Kenzie Bok
Chair, Ways & Means
1 City Hall Square, Suite 550
Boston, MA 02201-2043

Dear Councilor Bok,

My name is Patricia Leary and I am the Community Advocacy Director for Boston at the American Heart Association. The American Heart Association is the largest voluntary health organization in the world working to build healthier lives, free of cardiovascular diseases and stroke. These diseases remain our nation's #1 and #5 causes of mortality while stroke is a leading cause of disability.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written comments regarding Docket # 0588-0596: Orders for the FY21 operating budget and FY21 – FY25 capital budget for the City of Boston. During these unprecedented times, I commend Mayor Walsh, Cabinet Chiefs, City Departments, and members of the City Council for their quick response and commitment to the health and safety of all Bostonians.

This letter is in support of the proposed investments in the Boston Public Health Commission (BPHC) in the Mayor's FY21 proposed budget. We fully support the increase in funding for the Boston Public Health Commission, which is over \$102 million for FY21. The American Heart Association supports the increase in dedicated funding for BPHC's Community Initiatives Bureau, which houses the Chronic Disease Prevention and Control and Healthy Homes and Community Supports programs (\$5,731,267 proposed for FY21 vs. FY20 funding of \$5,472,452). These programs lead BPHC's work on primary and secondary prevention of diet and tobacco-related chronic diseases, with a focus on obesity, heart disease, hypertension, diabetes, and cancer. These programs implement low-cost and evidence-based programming, promoting policies that reach all Bostonians, especially those who face chronic disease and health inequities. With additional funding, programs to prevent and address chronic disease among some of our most vulnerable residents can be expanded to include increased access to healthy foods, nutrition education, physical education opportunities, active transportation, blood pressure screenings, and tobacco cessation. Ideally, additional funds would be used to grow secondary prevention efforts, including community blood pressure screenings that link residents to clinical resources to address their high blood pressure. Specifically, we seek to secure public funding of at least \$400,000 for hypertension programs and their evaluation, focusing on addressing health equity and eliminating disparities. Our research into stroke and heart attack prevention demonstrates that



increases of at least this amount across a population the size of Boston will support demonstrable gains in positive outcomes.

In addition, the American Heart Association supports increased funding specifically dedicated to tobacco prevention and control. The City of Boston has provided funding for tobacco control through its annual budget in the past. The funding goes to BPHC, who run programs and staffs, among other roles, a Tobacco Control Program Director. The Mayor proposed funding tobacco control at \$105,581 in the FY21 budget, up from \$83,911 in the FY20 budget. While we commend this increase, more should be done. With all the recent activity in the City and across Massachusetts to prohibit the sale of menthol, mint, and wintergreen products, more resources and staffing are needed for compliance checks and other activities related to strengthening the city's tobacco regulations. These funds could also support educational and professional development activities with the Boston Public Schools around the risks associated with youth tobacco and e-cigarette use, and for technical assistance for landlords transitioning to smoke-free housing, and other programs. In addition to tobacco control funding, we are also asking for \$300,000 for tobacco cessation programs and support counseling and services.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of Boston Public Health Commission funding in the Mayor's proposed FY21 operating budget and FY21 – FY25 Capital budget. While we realize that our city, state and nation are facing economic uncertainty in these unprecedented times, we feel that these community health initiatives are more important than ever. The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed long standing health inequities and as a community we have an opportunity to address them together.

I look forward to following the budget process and please feel free to reach out to me with any questions.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Patricia Leary".

Patricia Leary
Community Advocacy Director – Boston
American Heart Association

CC: City Councilors Kim Janey, Annissa Essaibi-George, Michael Flaherty, Julia Mejia, Michelle Wu, Lydia Edwards, Ed Flynn, Frank Baker, Andrea Campbell, Ricardo Arroyo, Matt O'Malley, and Liz Breadon.