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Calling for Urgent Reform, The Health Equity Compact Files Transformative Legislation to Advance Health Equity

55 Black and Latinx leaders file “An Act to Advance Health Equity,” seeking to make Massachusetts healthcare and health outcomes equitable for all

Boston, MA (January 23, 2023): The Health Equity Compact (HEC), a coalition of Black and Latinx leaders in health care, labor, business, and philanthropy advocating for breakthrough health reform, announced today it has filed transformational legislation to confront racial and ethnic disparities in health care and health outcomes. *An Act to Advance Health Equity* aims to center equity as the next chapter of Massachusetts health reform, building on the Commonwealth’s past landmark reforms of universal coverage and promoting cost containment and transparency of health care delivery.

The Compact represents a group of high-level executives and experts from organizations such as the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, Baystate Health, 1199SEIU United Healthcare Workers East, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts, the Massachusetts Business Roundtable, the New Commonwealth Racial Equity and Social Justice Fund, and others. Most recently, the coalition announced its membership grew to [55 leaders](#).

“Health inequity is an increasingly urgent issue in Massachusetts, and there are great costs – economic, personal and communal – associated with inaction,” said **Massachusetts League of Community Health Centers President and CEO Michael Curry**. “As the Health Equity Compact files this legislation, we look forward to collaborating with the Healey-Driscoll Administration and the legislature to accelerate an agenda that is long overdue: addressing the overwhelming disparities in health care and health outcomes that Black and Latinx communities face daily. This legislation, in tandem with the recent approval of the new MassHealth 1115 Waiver, marks the next chapter of Massachusetts health reform.”

The bill builds on and seeks to codify important momentum to center health and racial equity in the MassHealth 1115 Demonstration Waiver approved in September of 2022, which prioritizes accessible and value-based care, maintains near-universal insurance coverage, and addresses health-related social needs and promoting health equity in the Commonwealth.

The proposed legislation, *An Act to Advance Health Equity*, sponsored by Representative Bud Williams, Representative Judith Garcia, Senator Pavel Payano, and Senator Liz Miranda, will advance health equity in the Commonwealth through the following ways:

Prioritize Equity in Massachusetts State Government

- Create a new cabinet-level Executive Office of Equity, to be led by a Secretary of Equity
- Diversify gender and racial and ethnic composition within leadership of key state agencies, boards, and commissions

- Invest in community-defined and led efforts to build healthier communities by addressing the root causes of inequities

Standardize and Report on Data to Advance Health Equity

- Require the use of standardized health equity data metrics across provider and payer organizations and new accountability mechanisms for reporting the data
- Direct state agencies to report publicly on data to identify disparities and track progress on healthcare equity and social drivers of health in the Commonwealth

Improve Access and Quality of Care

- Provide full MassHealth coverage for all people who are otherwise eligible, regardless of immigration status, including young people
- Address increasing cost burden for individuals for certain medications for chronic conditions that disproportionately affect communities of color and low-income communities
- Require reimbursement parity for telehealth services for primary care and chronic disease management
- Authorize a career ladder program for diverse workers who reflect the communities they serve in safety net hospitals and other community providers
- Require provider organizations to meet or exceed national standards for culturally and linguistically appropriate services and multicultural health care

The Compact has several additional initiatives planned to advance its mission of creating equitable health outcomes alongside its legislation, including engaging with the community through meetings and forums across the state and, in partnership with the Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Foundation, developing a report on the economic impact of health inequities.

“It is our collective responsibility to provide equitable care experiences and resources, and improve health outcomes, especially for those residents who are consistently failed by our current framework,” said **Rosa Colon-Kolacko, Chief Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion Officer of Tufts Medicine**. “Now is the time to empower all people to live their best lives by reimagining healthcare in Massachusetts and for the healthcare system to become integrated and inclusive to better serve diverse communities – Black and Latinx individuals who face deep-rooted systemic barriers.”

The Compact was launched in [May 2022](#), convening Black and Latinx leaders across top health institutions including hospitals, health centers, payers, academic institutions, public health organizations and others to shift the underlying forces that perpetuate inequity and inaccessibility impacting our healthcare and health outcomes. The Compact uses its collective platform to advocate for key policy priorities that broaden the foundation for transformational efforts to advance health equity through legislation, budget, and other advocacy efforts, both at a state and organizational level.

A new website, now live at healthequitycompact.org, provides a centralized place to access the Compact’s priorities, membership, upcoming events, and key data and reports related to advancing health equity across the Commonwealth.

“Black and Brown communities across the Commonwealth have long suffered the fatal consequences of inequitable policies and systems,” said **State Representative Bud Williams, House Chair of Racial Equity, Civil Rights, and Inclusion**. “We have a historic opportunity with this legislation to fortify the Commonwealth’s mandate to prioritize and attain the fair and just opportunity for all Massachusetts residents - especially those from historically marginalized communities - to lead healthy lives.”

“An undeniable health crisis became apparent alongside the rise of COVID-19, both in communities like Chelsea and Everett, as well as statewide,” said **State Representative Judith Garcia**. “Responding to the devastating effects witnessed during the pandemic, this legislation seeks to eliminate systemic barriers and create new processes to provide equitable healthcare for everyone in Massachusetts.”

“An Act to Advance Health Equity represents an important step towards addressing the failings of our healthcare system and the root causes of health inequities across the Commonwealth,” said **Senator Pavel Payano**. “The longstanding health and healthcare challenges residents have faced in Haverhill, Lawrence, and Methuen are not and were never acceptable. Now is our chance to do something about it.”

“Massachusetts has shown that we are uniquely positioned to lead the charge in healthcare reform, and we have a responsibility to enact sweeping change for the benefit of all its residents,” said **Senator Liz Miranda**. “Health equity is a cause close to my heart, and I am honored to support legislation that strategically supports equitable health outcomes while promoting diversity and accountability among healthcare providers, payers, Massachusetts government and state agencies.”

About the Health Equity Compact

The Health Equity Compact is a coalition of over 55 Black and Latinx leaders who seek to dismantle systemic barriers to equitable health outcomes for all residents of the Commonwealth. Compact members are high-level executives and experts from a diverse set of health, business, and labor organizations, including hospitals, health centers, payers, academic institutions, and public health. Its members are committed to eliminating health inequities as the next chapter of health reform.

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