



CITY OF WORCESTER, MASSACHUSETTS
Department of Health & Human Services
Division of Public Health



Public Health
Prevent. Promote. Protect.

Matilde Castiel, MD
Health & Human Services
Commissioner

Karyn E. Clark
Public Health
Director

DATE: June 1, 2020
RE: WORCESTER BOARD OF HEALTH MEETING
START TIME: 6:30 PM
LOCATION: WEB EX CONFERENCE CALL

Welcome & Introductions:

Meeting was called to order at 6:36pm.

Members on call: Jerry Gurwitz, MD, Vice Chair, Frances Anthes, Chareese Allen and David Fort

Absent: Edith Claros, PhD, Chair WPDH Staff: Karyn Clark, Director of DPH, Michael Hirsh, MD, Medical Director of DPH, Joshan Niroula, Public Health Prevention Specialist and Michele Williams, Principal Clerk

Approval of the May 4, 2020 Meeting Minutes:

Motion to approve the WBOH meeting minutes of May 4, 2020 made by Frances Anthes, Second – David Fort – Approved

Approval of the June 1, 2020 Agenda:

Motion to approve the WBOH meeting agenda of June 1, 2020 made by Chareese Allen, Second – David Fort - Approved

Worcester Board of Health Statement on George Floyd:

Frances Anthes: We are at a critical public health issue beyond COVID19 in terms of what we seen about the violence committed against people of color in the United States. I would very much appreciate the BOH making a statement to that affect.

Chareese Allen: I am glad that the BOH is going to make a statement in regards to what is happening in this country. As an African American woman, it was hard to watch the video of George Floyd dying under the knee of the police officer.

David Fort: This is opening eyes to many people who have not experienced racism. As an African American male, it disturbs me. It would be helpful to hear from our local police department to find out what they are doing to identify the officers who could be the next “Officer Chauvin”.

Jerry Gurwitz, MD, Vice Chair: Read a statement on solidarity during this time of unrest. Asking the BOH to comment and make any modifications that they deem appropriate.



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Frances Anthes: Would like an acknowledgement of the violence that has been inflicted on persons of color and how we are reacting to that.

Chareese Allen: Agreed with Frances and would also like to add compassion.

David Fort: Would like to add to the statement that Police Departments should take upon themselves publically on how they can rule out systemic racism amongst their own ranks.

Frances Anthes made a motion to approve the additional sentence by Chareese Allen to be added into the original statement. Seconded by David Fort. BOH members: 4 - yes with one absentee: Edith Claros, PhD, Chair. The motion passed unanimously

Chareese Allen made a motion to approve an addendum by David Fort to be added to the end of the statement. Seconded by Frances Anthes. BOH members: 4 - yes with one absentee: Edith Claros, PhD, Chair. The motion passed unanimously

Chareese Allen made a motion to make modifications to three sentences by Frances Anthes in the original statement. Seconded by David Fort. BOH members: 4 - yes with one absentee: Edith Claros, PhD, Chair. The motion passed unanimously

Statement:

To the Worcester Community:

Black lives matter. The Worcester Board of Health condemns the violence that resulted in the death of George Floyd at the hands of Minneapolis police officers on May 25th and the previous centuries of acts of racist violence. We stand in solidarity with those who are calling for a just response. We condemn the pain and suffering that has been endured for far too long. We remember and mourn all the lives lost. Recognizing the public health aspects of racism, our community health improvement plan has a common goal of health equity by addressing racism and discrimination through targeted evidenced based strategies. We are well-aware that the pandemic that we are currently living through has disproportionately impacted the health, economic stability and mortality of persons of color in our community. It has separated so many of us from regular physical contact. The forced isolation in no way relieves us from responsibility to denounce acts of racial violence. Racism in all its forms must be dismantled. We are called by this historic moment to shed our fear of the other, embrace one another, stand up, protect, and love one another. We join with others who are seeking systemic solutions to long-standing and deep-seated racism in our country. We commit to helping create opportunities for the voices of those who have long been silenced and oppressed to be heard. We are committed to supporting our city and nation to learn, change and heal. We as a Board of Health urge the leadership of the Worcester Police Department and all police departments (note: including police academies) in Massachusetts and throughout the United States to publicly and immediately share what their specific processes and measures are to identify, educate, re-train and/or if necessary, preclude (in the case of cadets) and dismiss (in the case of current officers) persons who possess white supremacist/racist views and are inclined to impose (or have in the past imposed) these views to mistreat (i.e. physically, verbally, legally, etc.) black and brown people that they encounter in the communities that they are charged to protect and serve.

Review and discussion on adoption of new state tobacco laws at the local level:

Joshua Niroula, Public Prevention Specialist: Presentation distributed on the local tobacco policy updates. The State Law was passed in November 2020 but went into effect June 1, 2020. The sale of flavored combustible cigarettes and other tobacco products, including menthol cigarettes and flavored chewing tobacco, will be restricted to licensed smoking bars for on-site consumption only. This will be enforceable starting June 12, 2020. In addition a 75% excise tax on the wholesale price of nicotine vaping products and the state's 6.75% sales tax. Smoking Bars are licensed by the Massachusetts Department of Revenue. Provided retailers with a list of what tobacco products can be sold in their establishment and have been notified of the new State Law and how the changes will affect different tobacco retail establishments. State Law also increased fines for violations of certain provisions. First violation - \$1,000.00 fine; Second violation within 36 months of the current violation - \$2,000.00 fine; three or more violations within a 36 month period - \$5,000.00 fine.

Chareese Allen made a motion to approve a public hearing relating to the adoption of new state tobacco laws at the local level at the next BOH meeting on July 13th. Seconded by Frances Anthes. BOH members: 4 yes with one absentee: Edith Claros, PhD, Chair. The motion passed unanimously.

Review and discussion of COVID19 related efforts Statewide due to Nursing Homes:

Michael Hirsh, MD, Medical Director of DPH: Elderly COVID19 positive individuals have been placed in Beaumont Nursing Home. DCU Center is divided into two; some are patients that need the convalescent time and some are homeless. The total overall number shows 342 deaths in Worcester. 219 have been related to long term care facilities. Briefed the BOH on how the COVID19 positive cases were reported to the DPH. I and the Public Health nurses made sure that the nursing home facilities had the proper protective gear and the proper steps to take. There are definitely positive caregiving relationships with the elderly and staff.

Jerry Gurwitz, MD, Vice Chair: 64% of deaths in Worcester were related to long term care facilities; across the state was 62%. There are 7,035 deaths in Massachusetts, of those 4,349 are from long term care facilities.

Other COVID19 Updates:

Michael Hirsh, MD, Medical Director of DPH: A lot of individuals are essential personnel; who felt the pressure that they had to work or they would lose their job, or individuals living in a small apartment where once one tests positive they would not have a place to quarantine. We saw tremendous efforts made due to the homeless population. Worcester Tech High School to have COVID19 patients and North High to have negative patients. In addition, we also have Ascension church and St. John's church to hold 25 (each) of COVID negative patients. There are 26 individuals left at North High School. Hopefully a vaccine will get us out of this morass.

Review and updates of the upticks in; suicide, mental health, domestic violence and cyber abuse:

Michael Hirsh, MD, Medical Director of DPH: The amount of child abuse and domestic violence has increased over the last 3 months. It's been a challenge for families to be quarantined in a small apartment. I'm concerned about mental health and suicide with the economic hardships that have been brought on to so many employees and business owners without having paychecks coming in

and wondering if they would get relieve funding or employment benefits. Also worried about medical staff and their wellbeing.

Motion to adjourn; Chareese Allen seconded by David Fort

Adjourn: 8:26pm

Next Meeting -- July 13, 2020 at 6:30pm

Potential Future Meeting Topics:

Adoption of new state tobacco laws at the local level – Hearing and vote

Updates on coronavirus including discussion on communities of color

Updates on behavioral health, child abuse and domestic violence

Opening schools in the fall