

**MetroWest
Center For
Independent Living**

**People with Disabilities
Living in the Community**

Covid-19 Updates

This is the 15th special alert for Coronavirus Updates. This week we do not have any new information on the virus, but we do have some state wide pandemic-related news.

This week is also the 30th anniversary of the signing of the Americans with Disabilities Act - July 26, 1990. We have seen many great summaries of the amazing accomplishments since then, as well as many advocates outlining the existing barriers to full equal civil rights. Advocacy methods may have changed since the pandemic, but they are still necessary. And voting remains key to ensuring the laws we need are passed and enforced.

MetroWest Center has not yet begun to bring staff back into the office. We are fully staffed on-line and ready to work with all consumers. We will resolve as much as possible remotely to protect both our staff and consumers.

Visit our [Website Covid-19 page](#) and download our [Local Resources pdf](#).

Paul Spooner,
Executive Director



Courtland Townsend III from BCIL and 2 ASL interpreters
at ADA 30 Celebration

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MetroWest Resources

MWCIL.org has a Covid-19 page with local and national resources, information on the disease, and more. Visit mwcil.org.

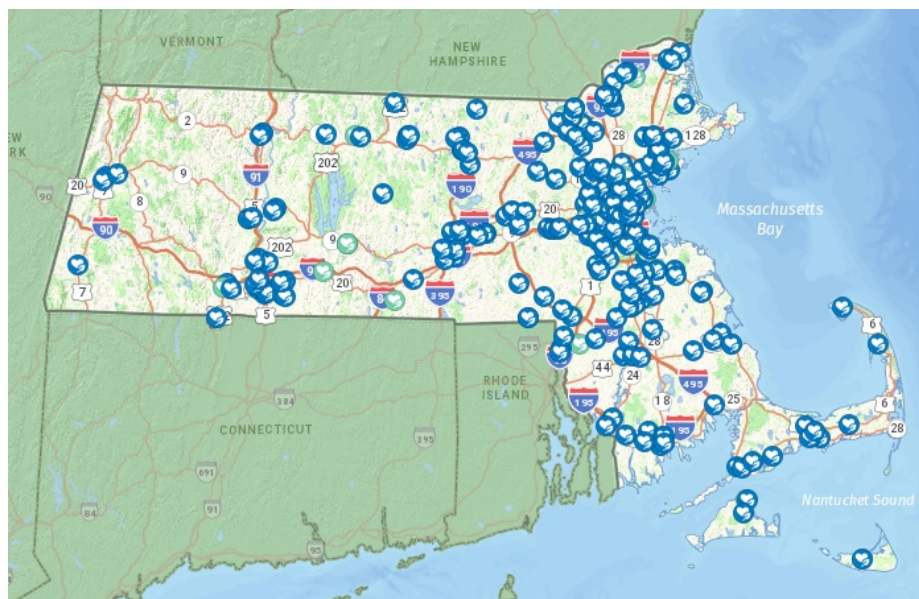
MetroWest Center for Independent Living has compiled information from most of our service area towns. This file is updated weekly: [MWCIL Service area resources.pdf](#)

We recommend Senate President Karen Spilka's page of resources available for MetroWest residents. Visit <https://karenspilka.com/covid>.

MWRTA has launched the "4 Grocery" shuttle to run hourly between 7 a.m. and 5 p.m. to carry shoppers from the Framingham hub to the Market Basket in Ashland, Roche Bros. in Natick, and the Wegman's at the Natick Mall. Read more at www.mwrta.com/application/files/.

Testing Sites

Visit this interactive, online map to find testing sites statewide: memamaps.maps.arcgis.com



Map of MA testing sites

Massachusetts Reopening

We are in Phase 3 state wide.

The [third part](#) of the four-phase reopening plan, called the "vigilant

phase," will last significantly longer than the other phases, the governor said, so officials can monitor the impact the move to Phase 3 will have on public health data.

Residents can submit workplace safety complaints to the Attorney General's webpage. <https://www.mass.gov/forms/report-unsafe-working-conditions-in-massachusetts-during-covid-19>

Governor Baker created a new webpage for worker safety complaints which directs employees to contact their local board of health. <https://www.mass.gov/forms/report-unsafe-working-conditions-in-massachusetts-during-covid-19>

Visit [Mass.gov](https://www.mass.gov) to learn the details of reopening, including workplace protocols, and business safety standards. *Know the risks, and your personal tolerance for risks, and set your own priorities!*

To gain some insights into the complexity of the reopening roadmaps, read this article by Juliette Kayyem for the Atlantic. [Reopening Schools was just an Afterthought. Americans found out the hard way that education is essential infrastructure.](#)

Vote By Mail

Most if not all registered voters have received an application for a Vote By Mail ballot. MWCIL and REV UP Massachusetts encourage you to return the application as soon as possible to allow time for the Post Office to deal with the added volume.

Do you have questions and concerns about Voting by Mail? Visit [REVUPMA.org](https://www.revupma.org) and learn more about voting by mail.

Reopening Schools

Reopening Plans: Most, if not all, school districts have not yet stated what their plans for the fall are. Districts are beginning to hint at their thinking on this important topic. [WBUR details the guidance from state education leaders](#). Apparently, each district can choose their own strategy, with the mostly voluntary state guidelines. Sort of a mess??

- [The Patch reported that Framingham may start fully remote](#), through October.
- [NBC 10 says that Boston is considering a Hopscotch method](#).

Special Education: Special Education has numerous unique challenges, and need to be at the tables as districts make their reopening plans. *However, these challenges do not excuse the fact that multiple districts*

asked parents to sign away special education rights. The [Boston Globe](#) reported this story on July 22, and it is deeply disturbing. "...the state says Granby and at least 10 other Massachusetts school districts, including Beverly, Malden, and Norfolk, violated state and federal special education laws by asking parents this spring to absolve school districts of key special education responsibilities, including, in some cases, the provision of vital services (such as speech therapy and one-on-one reading help), and, in others, the requirement to follow a strict timeline governing how quickly a child must be assessed for a disability and provided an instruction plan.

The state is still investigating several other districts, including Braintree, Brookline, Hingham, and Framingham (one of them, Keefe Regional Technical School, denied issuing waivers)."

School Bus Guidelines: "The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education released guidance Wednesday regarding school transportation. It outlines social distancing measures - which will limit capacity on school bus routes - as well as the need for ventilation and mandatory masks for all on board." [Read more about school bus guidelines at Masslive.com.](#)

REquipment Budget Slashed

The state is beginning to experience serious budget issues, with revenues way down and expenses increasing. While we can expect more cuts, REquipment is not expensive, and provides such a valuable service. Durable Medical Equipment is very expensive. *Providing free equipment to consumers should reduce expenses for the state!*

Please contact your legislators, and ask them to restore the budget through June 30, 2021.

Read more at dmereuse.org/effective-immediately-requipments-budget-is-cut-80/



Moratorium on Evictions Extended

After announcing another [\\$20 million in funding for homelessness prevention and other community aid](#) last week, Governor Charlie Baker declared an additional 60 day moratorium on evictions.

The moratorium, as reported at [MassLive.com](#), was "originally set to expire Aug. 18, now remains in place until Oct. 17, and puts a pause on "non-essential" eviction cases against residential tenants and small businesses in housing court due to COVID-19. That includes no-cause evictions, those for non-payment of rent, those resulting from a foreclosure or for a cause other than allegations of criminal activity or lease violations threatening public safety."

Needless to say, landlords disagree with this extension. WBUR reported that [Landlords File Legal Challenge to Eviction Moratorium](#).

Looking at the Americans with Disabilities Act: 30 years later ... and during a global pandemic

[MetroWest Daily News](#) by Lauren Young, July 26, 2020. Interview with MWCIL Executive Director, Paul Spooner:

"People with disabilities, whether or not they're elders, have disproportionately been victims of this pandemic," said Paul Spooner, director of the MetroWest Center for Independent Living. "We can't allow what has happened to happen again. My biggest fear is getting sick and ending up at a nursing home, then I lose my dignity, my privacy - everything we as human beings strive to have. Is it fair to make me suffer without that because I have disability?"

REGIONAL - There are about 56,000 people living in Massachusetts nursing homes, but about 10,000 to 20,000 of them could be living in their own homes.

That's according to Paul Spooner, director of the MetroWest Center for Independent Living, who said finding a place to live at home with care - and affording it - remains a problem for people with disabilities 30 years after the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was passed on July 26, 1990.

The act doesn't guarantee private housing, but nine years after it was passed, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in favor of the Olmstead v. L.C. decision because of it.

The decision was made on June 22, 1999, and ruled that the unjustified segregation of people with disabilities is discrimination because it violates the ADA, and that individuals have a right to live in their community when appropriate instead of in an institution. But how people with

disabilities can afford to live on their own outside living with others - like in institutions and nursing homes - remains a question.

"It's just available housing because there aren't much other resources for people living in the community," said Spooner, 65, who has muscular atrophy and has used a wheelchair since he was 7 years old. He can afford to live in his own home, but lack of Medicaid funding prohibits others from doing the same. "Just look at where the highest death toll of people is," he said. "It's in nursing homes."

He's referring to over 43,000 residents and healthcare workers who have died from COVID-19 at long-term care facilities, like nursing homes, across the nation - representing over 40% of all confirmed coronavirus cases. In Massachusetts, 5,398 people in long-term care facilities have died from it as of July 23, according to the Massachusetts Department of Public Health.

While disability alone might not increase someone's risk of getting COVID-19 or developing a severe illness because of it, underlying medical conditions will, according to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).

On average, the MetroWest Center for Independent Living helps out 20 to 30 individuals with disabilities a year move out of nursing homes, said Spooner. But now, most of the organization's plans are on hold. Staff from the center can't even access nursing homes to interact with them, he said, and it can be difficult to meet over the phone or computer if they don't have access to that.

The ADA, signed into law by President George H.W. Bush, prohibits discrimination based on disability, defined as "a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits a major life activity."

"George Bush Sr. said, 'Let the shameful wall of exclusion finally come tumbling down' - and they have," said Spooner. "The Fourth of July is a day where most people celebrate their civil rights. July 26 is my Fourth of July."

Since 1990, more people with disabilities are working, and more businesses, restaurants and buildings are ADA-compliant, said Spooner. Daily nuances, like disabled parking, elevators and automatic doors have also improved considerably, he said.

"So many places are being built fully accessible from the beginning, vs. 30 years ago when it was more about retrofitting and modifying existing buildings," he said.

Accessible transportation has also traveled far, said Kathy Gips, director of training at the New England ADA Center, and she's reminded of it whenever she sees someone in a wheelchair taking a paratransit. Still, not all the lines on the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority's (MBTA) Commuter Rail are ADA-compliant, such as on the Franklin Line. Many other barriers also have yet to be broken.

On a weekly basis, the MetroWest Center for Independent Living files about four to five complaints relating to building accessibility under regulations set by the Mass. Architectural Access Board, said Spooner. This equals to about 200 complaints a year.

Many municipal buildings are still not ADA-compliant, said Gips, and as a push is made for outdoor dining amid the pandemic, making it accessible for everyone is often neglected, said Spooner. Handicapped spots are usually the first to go when it comes to finding a place to put outdoor seating in a parking lot, he said, and some businesses line up planters along the curb, blocking curb cuts so people using wheelchairs can't get on the sidewalk.

Providing interpreters for those who are deaf also remains very expensive, said Gips.

"We hear (how expensive it is) from a lot of doctors and dentists because (interpreters) often cost more than the amount that person is paying, or what their insurance is paying, for that visit," said Gips. It's also an issue if someone who is deaf wants to participate in any town meetings or other forms of government but has no one to interpret for them, she said. Making websites accessible for those who are partially sighted or blind also remains an issue, and has been the subject of many lawsuits over the years, said Gips and Spooner.

As more businesses have shifted online due to the pandemic, many people with disabilities are turning to the internet to buy the essentials - which can be a problem if a website isn't accessible to them, said Spooner. Using assistive technology, someone with visual impairments can understand what's on a website, and features like closed captioning and creating alt text for all photos, videos and audio files on a website can help them do that.

The amount of calls made to both the MetroWest Center for Independent Living and the New England ADA Center in Boston have escalated regarding these issues.

The MetroWest Center for Independent Living yields a caseload of about 500 people in the MetroWest region, and receives calls from over 1,000 people annually, said Spooner. During the coronavirus pandemic, many of

those calls have included picking up prescriptions and groceries, help with ordering online and providing personal protective equipment (PPE) like masks and gloves for people with disabilities, he said.

Over at the New England ADA Center, staff are taking more calls from people concerned about not being able to wear masks because of a disability or worries about returning to work or a university and catching COVID-19 or worsening their current conditions, said Gips.

When it comes to wearing masks, the ADA requires that public places make a reasonable accommodation for someone with disabilities if they can't wear one.

"That doesn't mean they have to allow someone inside without a mask - it just means they have to make a reasonable accommodation for them," she said.

As a result of this pandemic, Spooner foresees an increased need for mental health services for those who are disabled, as anxiety levels have skyrocketed for certain people with others facing situations like domestic violence or child abuse.

That's why staff at the MetroWest center perform regular wellness check-ups on clients, said Spooner, though he worries some are not adequately addressing their medical conditions with their doctors, as most hospitals have been routinely overwhelmed with COVID-19 patients.

"It just shows you how fragile some of our systems are," he said.

However, some positives have emerged during this time, one of them being money the MetroWest center received via the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act to spend on people especially affected by the pandemic. The center received a small amount of money, said Spooner, but with that amount, they will be able to buy a laptop for a woman with a disability who could only access internet at the library, where she spent most of her time searching for housing, and the center can also build a wheelchair ramp for a local 4-year-old whose grandmother has to carry him out of the house to leave.

In the 30 years since the ADA was passed, Spooner said one of its greatest accomplishments was teaching a new generation of people that they have a right to access the world around them.

"The inspiration I feel from young people with disabilities talking about the intersectionality of disability, race, poverty and the sense of empowerment they feel for their place in society is a result of the ADA," he said. "It's what keeps me going working in this community."

Lauren Young writes about politics, social issues and covers the town of Franklin. Reach her at 774-804-1499 or lyoung@wickedlocal.com. Follow her on Twitter [@laurenatmilford](https://twitter.com/laurenatmilford).

2020 - 30 Years after the signing of the ADA

For the 30th Anniversary, we are seeing divergent answers to the question: Is the glass half full or half empty?

If you missed the Boston ADA 30 online celebration, you can watch it on [facebook.com](https://www.facebook.com). The event was well done, with excellent speakers and information. The successes and opportunities for improvement are discussed.

Successes:.

- The [Northeast ADA Center](#) asked Doug Usiak talk about impacts of the ADA. Given that we are usually in the midst of yet another advocacy challenge, it is easy to forgot about the many positive impacts. Doug will remind you!
- [Forbes.com](#) has an article with some of the history of the ADA as well as the personal stories of 3 women,

Work to Be Done:

- Boston Center for Independent Living has a [Call to Action webpage](#), highlighting issues of voting and nursing homes.
- Reyma McCoy McDeid writes about the lack of diversity in IL and SILCs for the [Disability Visibility Project](#). She also had a workshop at the NCIL conference and spoke of the lack of racially marginalized people as consumers, staff and decision makers at many CILS.
- [NCIL Policy Briefing](#) - The National Council on Independent Living has prepared a Policy Briefing for advocates to talk about with their legislators in Washington. We recommend you start with the PDF for a good overview of the issues.



Start of 2015 ADA March in Boston

Face Masks for PCAs

Thank you to the Disability Policy Consortium for this information:

Consumers of the Massachusetts PCA program can get **free masks and gloves delivered for PCAs** from their union, [1199SEIU](#). PCAs can order the masks online using the [1199SEIU order form](#).

Mass.gov Resources

Main information page on the Coronavirus:

<https://www.mass.gov/resource/information-on-the-outbreak-of-coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19>

Mass Health:

- **Long Term Supports and Services including PCA information:** <https://www.mass.gov/doc/ltss-provider-updates-for-covid-19/download>
- Expansion of **Home Health Aide Services:** [MassOptions.org](#). **MassOptions hotline** at 1-844-422-6277
- **Consumer Information:** <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/masshealth-coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19-applicants-and-members-0>
- **General MassHealth Information:** www.mass.gov/coronavirus-disease-covid-19-and-masshealth
- **90 Day Supplies of Medication for MassHealth Members:** www.mass.gov/doc/pharmacy-facts-141-march-12-2020-0/download

Attorney General: <https://www.mass.gov/guides/resources-during->

Housing

The state is implementing a temporary moratorium on evictions and foreclosures due to Covid 19. If you are having trouble making rent, talk to your landlord and get everything in writing for proof of conversations later on.

- **Detailed information** (a little tough to navigate) - www.mass.gov/lists/moratorium-on-evictions-and-foreclosures-forms-and-other-resources
- **RESIDENTIAL TENANTS:** In order to avoid having to pay late fees or receiving a negative credit report, the law requires tenants to send a form of hardship notice to their landlord within 30 days of every missed rent payment. That means if a tenant missed paying rent due April 1, the tenant must send the form by April 30 (3 days from now). One form must be filled out for each month of missed payment. If a tenant is unable to fill out and transmit the form, they can also email or post a letter to the landlord with the same information. Direct link to form: www.mass.gov/doc/form-of-notice-and-documentation-covid-19-hardship-residential-tenant/download
- **HOMEOWNERS:** The Division of Banks has also put out a Frequently Asked Questions document regarding the moratorium on foreclosures. Direct link here: www.mass.gov/doc/chapter-65-dob-faq
- **SMALL BUSINESS TENANTS:** Similar to residential tenants, small businesses are also not subject to late fees or negative credit bureau reporting if they submit a form of notice to their landlord within 30 days of missed rent payment. Small businesses must submit two forms:
 - A certification of hardship: www.mass.gov/doc/form-of-notice-covid-19-hardship-small-business-tenant
 - Back up documentation: www.mass.gov/doc/documentation-of-financial-hardship-small-business-tenant
- **LANDLORDS:** The law allows the landlord to use last month's rent to pay for certain expenses including, but not limited to, mortgage payments, utilities, repairs and required upkeep. However the landlord must send a form of notice to the tenant when doing so. The form is here: www.mass.gov/doc/notice-to-tenant-use-of-advance-rent-payment
- **Help with Rent**
 - List of regional agencies, see www.masshousinginfo.org/regional-agencies.
 - Additional information about resources for tenants is available at www.mhp.net/news/2020/resources-for-tenants-during-covid-19-pandemic.
- You will not be subject to late fees or a negative report to a credit bureau if you certify to your landlord in writing within 30 days from

the missed payment that your non-payment of rent is due to a financial impact from COVID-19. If possible, you should use the approved form at: <https://www.mass.gov/lists/moratorium-on-evictions-and-foreclosures-forms-and-other-resources>. If you cannot access the form on this website, you can ask your landlord to provide the form to you. You may also send a letter or email so long as it contains a detailed explanation of your household loss in income or increase in expenses due to COVID-19.

Department of Community and Housing Development (DHCD)

- Information including updates for Residential Assistance for Families in Transition (RAFT) Program - [www.mass.gov/info-details/covid-19-dhcd-website#residential-assistance-for-families-in-transition-\(raft\)-program-and-covid-19-state-of-emergency-](http://www.mass.gov/info-details/covid-19-dhcd-website#residential-assistance-for-families-in-transition-(raft)-program-and-covid-19-state-of-emergency-)
- RAFT Policy Changes during COVID-19.php

CHAPA has adapted operations and policy priorities. COVID-19 Affordable Housing Resources: www.chapa.org

Housing Consumer Education Centers - Download the [Covid-19-Housing-Resources.pdf](#) flyer.

Unemployment

Mass.gov has an online, virtual town hall that will teach you how to sign up for unemployment. Visit www.mass.gov/forms/massachusetts-department-of-unemployment-assistance-dua-virtual-town-halls.

Or visit the State Unemployment Insurance page for online application forms, as well as links to rules and exceptions during the Covid-19 pandemic. www.mass.gov/unemployment-insurance-ui-online.

Food

Visit foodpantries.org to see all of the food pantries in MA.

Senate President Karen Spilka's MetroWest Resource page has many local food sources: karenspilka.com/updates/2020/3/13/metrowest-covid-19-resources

Project Bread has additional food sources: www.projectbread.org/get-help.

Massachusetts residents can use SNAP benefits to purchase groceries online via Walmart and Amazon, with more grocery retailers hopefully joining the program soon. Visit Mass.gov for more information. The

state's Online Purchasing Program Outreach Flyers are now available in Spanish.

MassHealth Food Assistance Flyers

- [Food Assistance.php](#) - English
- [Asistencia alimentaria durante la emergencia por COVID-19.php](#)
Spanish

2020 Census

Complete your census! This information is completely confidential. Please let us know if you have questions.

Visit the [Revupma.org page](#) for more information and resources about the Census.

To participate in the upcoming census, visit www.censuscounts.org.

Activist Resources and Directories

National Contact Information

[Directory of House of Representatives](#)

[Directory of Senators](#)

Senator Edward J. Markey

Address:

255 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington DC 20510

Phone:

(202) 224-2742

Contact:

www.markey.senate.gov/contact

Website:

<http://www.markey.senate.gov/>

Senator Elizabeth Warren

Address:

317 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington DC 20510

Phone:

(202) 224-4543

Contact:

<https://www.warren.senate.gov/contact/shareyouropinion>

Website:

<http://www.warren.senate.gov/>

State Government Contact Information

[Directories of State Senators and Representatives](#)

[Contact Governor Baker](#)

[WhereDoIVoteMa.com](#) - Enter your address, and get a list of all of your elected officials.

National Resources

Save My Care - a movement to bring together families, advocates and health care providers to protect the health and financial security of all Americans. [Visit the website.](#)

National Council on Independent Living has Action Alerts for issues on the table in Washington. [Visit the Advocacy Monitor webpage.](#)

Join REV UP - Make the disability vote count!

For more information, visit www.revupma.org.

And follow our [Face Book page!](#)



MA Tales of Independence

Visit our video projects at: www.matalesofindependence.net.

The concept and history of Independent Living are complex. MA Tales of Independence is a collection of videos by people who are successfully living independently. Each person tells their story including things like: how they achieved independence, why independence is important to them and what barriers they had



to overcome. Some of our videos have historical information about the struggle and others are about growing up today. Most have college degrees, jobs and families.



2020 Staff (visit the [staff page](#) for more info!)

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