



Commonwealth of Massachusetts
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**SENATOR LESSER ISSUES STATEMENT URGING GOV. BAKER TO OFFER
FREE TESTING WEST OF I-495**

SPRINGFIELD — The following is a statement from Senator Eric P. Lesser (D-First Hampden and Hampshire) in regards to the Stop the Spread initiative announced by Governor Baker this Wednesday. The Stop the Spread testing initiative targets eight hotspots: Chelsea, Everett, Fall River, Lawrence, Lynn, Lowell, Marlborough, and New Bedford where cases and positive test rates have exceeded the statewide average and where the volume of testing has declined over the past two months.

“I applaud and fully support Governor Baker’s effort to establish free on-demand testing for residents of Massachusetts and believe that the eight cities announced are a good start. However, it is simply unacceptable that there is not one testing site west of I-495. Many of the risk factors most associated with COVID-19 such as age and underlying health conditions like diabetes and asthma are highly prevalent in Western Massachusetts. These are also areas with diverse populations and underlying racial and economic disparities.

Those are just some of the many factors as to why Hampden County has a fatality rate of 9.73 percent as compared to the Statewide fatality rate of 7.66 percent. The eight locations mean that a person looking for a test in Springfield, Chicopee, or Holyoke would have to drive nearly 70 miles to the nearest site in Marlboro, and that a resident in Pittsfield would have to drive 116 miles.

The effort to test the communities in this first round are laudable and have my full support, but it is simply inexcusable to exclude a geographic area spanning 4,280 square miles and a population of over 1.65 million. Our community health centers and hospitals have stepped up in regards to testing and should not be left to shoulder that burden alone. We cannot afford to take reactive measures with this virus. Proactivity and widespread testing to

these high-risk areas and populations are a critical measure in ensuring that all residents of Massachusetts are protected and doing their part to stop the spread.”

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