

April 4, 2020
Boston, Massachusetts

We are healthcare professionals with expertise in infectious diseases and community medicine, and we support Governor Baker's bold initiative to scale up COVID-19 contact tracing in conjunction with Partners in Health. But we fear this initiative will fail unless the Commonwealth institutes a moratorium on immigration enforcement.

Contact tracing in a democratic society depends on trust. In countries like South Korea, public health officials can depend on their at-risk communities to help identify and report new cases. Unfortunately, ICE surveillance and other forms of immigration enforcement have destroyed that trust for many of our most vulnerable communities. Long before COVID-19, healthcare providers and advocates pointed out that **fear of ICE enforcement and surveillance prevents immigrants from seeking medical attention**. Recent implementation of the "public charge" rule, and executive orders increasing ICE presence in certain areas, have only made this situation worse. Many of our patients fear that by accessing healthcare and social services, their chances for obtaining permanent legal status will be negatively affected. Many others fear the uniformed security officers and police who are to be found in and around clinic entrances and emergency rooms.

Now, in the midst of the COVID-19 crisis, that chronic injustice has transformed into an acute public health threat. The reason is biological, not political: it is a basic principle of infectious diseases that when a sizable fraction of a population is effectively excluded from infection control measures, those measures will not succeed. This situation is not only unjust; from a medical and public health perspective, it is dangerous for all of us.

Immigrants and their families need to know that it is safe to seek medical care if or when they need it. They need to know that if they become ill with COVID-19 and require isolation and treatment, they will be cared for and not punished. Until this is the case, all of us will remain at increased risk.

Our elected officials should address this problem quickly and forcefully. While states do not directly control ICE activity, **Governor Baker should join with other state leaders in calling for an immediate moratorium on all immigration enforcement, including arrests and detentions**, at the very least for the duration of the COVID-19 emergency. Permanent changes include pending state legislation —The Massachusetts Safe Communities Act (H.3573 and S.1401) — that would free police and court officials from having to inquire about immigration status. Gov. Baker should publicly endorse this bill and commit to signing it immediately upon passage.

Once such policies are in place, they must be publicized widely in immigrant communities. The Baker administration should act in concert with municipal agencies and community leaders, churches, hospitals, community health centers and the media, to provide clear — and *welcoming* — information on how to protect one's family, contacts and the public at large from infection.

Immigration enforcement exacerbates the COVID-19 crisis. To protect the health and safety of our Commonwealth, it needs to be halted. And time is of the essence.

Fiona Danaher, MD

Co-Chair, Massachusetts General Hospital Immigrant Health Coalition
Instructor in Pediatrics, Harvard Medical School

Jason Harris, MD MPH

Director, Pediatric Global Health, Massachusetts General Hospital
Associate Professor of Pediatrics, Harvard Medical School

Rashmi Jasrasaria, MD

Adult Medicine Unit, Massachusetts General Hospital Chelsea HealthCare Center
Instructor in Medicine, Harvard Medical School

Regina LaRocque, MD, MPH

Division of Infectious Diseases, Massachusetts General Hospital
Associate Professor of Medicine, Harvard Medical School

Jim Recht, MD

Clinical Consultant in Psychiatry, Massachusetts General Hospital
Clinical Assistant Professor of Psychiatry Part-Time, Harvard Medical School