

Massachusetts legal issues related to COVID-19

The current COVID-19 crisis raises many legal issues beyond the kinds of discrimination and civil rights issues that CAIR-MA handles. We don't have the expertise or resources to take on these issues, but we do want to refer you to the right state agencies and trusted legal organizations that can help with some critical issues. See the list of phone numbers on the next page.

Workplace issues. In general:

- [Frequently Asked Questions About COVID-19: Employee Rights and Employer Obligations](#) – The Fair Labor Division of the Massachusetts Attorney General's office offers information on many issues, ranging from use of earned sick leave to an employer's duty to pay laid-off workers all wages due on the day they are laid off.
- [Leave and Benefit Rights in MA: Know your workplace rights during the Corona virus](#) – Learn more about Mass. paid sick leave, federal emergency paid leave, working conditions, and who you can call for help. (*Justice at Work, Greater Boston Legal Services, Lawyers for Civil Rights*)

Health and safety on the job. For most jobs, there is no law that requires an employer to provide equipment to protect you from COVID-19, such as masks and gloves. But there are guidelines encouraging employers to do so.

- If you have concerns about safety where you work, call the *Attorney General's Fair Labor Division* hotline at 617-727-3465 (available between 10 am and 4 pm).
- [COVID-19 Toolkit for Essential Workers](#) – Includes information on employer's duties and who to call for help, as well as guidelines for specific jobs, such as grocery/retail, transportation, janitors/cleaners, airport workers, and others. (*Mass. Coalition for Occupational Safety and Health*)

Unemployment Insurance. Out of work? You may be able to get [Unemployment Insurance](#) benefits, which are temporary payments while you look for a new job. Apply right away – during the first week you are laid off. NOTE: If you receive Unemployment Insurance, that will not affect your immigration status under the "public charge" rule.

- The Massachusetts Department of Unemployment Assistance (DUA) is in charge of Unemployment Insurance. Their website explains [what you will need to apply](#) and how the process works. You can fill out the application form [online](#), although it is in English and doesn't work well with a Smartphone or tablet. DUA also has a [step-by-step guide](#) on how to file online, also available in [Arabic](#), [Spanish](#), and [other languages](#). If you have questions about how to apply, use this [request form](#) and someone will get back to you, in the language you prefer. Please keep in mind, however, that DUA is trying to handle a huge number of calls.

- [The CARES Act and Unemployment](#) -- If you qualify, Massachusetts pays UI benefits for up to 26 weeks. In addition, there are new programs that:
 - Pay an extra \$600/week (up to July 25, 2020) for up to 39 weeks;
 - Help workers who have used up or are denied regular state UI benefits; and
 - Help workers not usually eligible for UI, such as the self-employed, independent contractors, full-time students with part-time jobs, religious workers, and others. (*Great Boston Legal Services & Mass. Law Reform Institute*)

COVID-19 stimulus payments. The federal government has started to send out “stimulus” or “[economic impact](#)” payments – one-time payments based on your “adjusted gross income” (total income minus certain deductions). You don’t need to apply; money should be sent automatically. However each person or child must have a Social Security number and must be a U.S. citizen or [resident alien](#). Payment amounts:

- \$1,200 payment to [single persons](#) with an adjusted gross income up to \$75,000;
- \$2,400 payment to [married couples](#) with an adjusted gross income up to \$150,000;
- \$500 for each child 16 or younger as of December 31, 2019;
- For higher incomes, see Question 17 [here](#).

If you gave bank account information on your 2018 or 2019 federal tax return, the payment will be sent to that account. If not, a check will be mailed to you, which could take several months. You can check the status of your payment [here](#).

Evictions. In Massachusetts, you [cannot be evicted](#) from your home during the COVID-19 crisis, except where there is criminal activity or a tenant endangers the health and safety of others. A landlord cannot send you an eviction notice or take you to Housing Court. Evictions are on hold until [October 17, 2020](#) OR for 45 days after the Governor lifts the state of emergency, whichever comes first. During this time, you must still pay your rent. Landlords cannot charge late fees if you are late with your rent due to COVID-19, such as illness or job loss. But you need to let your landlord know, in writing, within 30 days after the rent is due. (*Mass. Law Reform Institute*)

Phone numbers.

- [Massachusetts Attorney General’s Fair Labor Division](#), for workplace conditions: 617-727-3465. Translators may be available.
- [Massachusetts Dept. of Unemployment Assistance](#), for Unemployment Insurance payments: 877-626-6800. Hours: Monday – Friday, 8:30 am to 4:30 pm. Saturdays, 8:00 am to noon. Translators should be available.
- [Greater Boston Legal Services](#), 617-371-1234, for free legal help for low-income residents of Boston and [31 other towns](#). For Cambridge or Somerville, call Cambridge & Somerville Legal Services, 617-603-2700. Cases handled include employment problems, immigration, evictions, and domestic violence. Translators are available at both GBLS and CSLS. If you are low-income but don’t live in any of the towns they cover, [Mass Legal Help](#) can help you find other legal aid/legal services offices in Massachusetts.