

## 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 government 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, available in [Arabic](#), [Spanish](#), and [other languages](#).

- [The CARES Act and Unemployment](#) – If you qualify, Massachusetts pays UI benefits for up to 26 weeks. In addition, there are 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 – second round.** In early 2020, the federal government sent out “stimulus” payments based on your income (minus certain deductions). In late 2020, a second round of stimulus payments was approved for those who meet [certain requirements](#). As before, you don’t need to apply for the payments, which [should start in January 2021](#), mainly by direct deposit to your bank account. (*Mass. Law Reform Institute/Greater Boston Legal Services and U.S. Internal Revenue Service*)

**Residential evictions.** The temporary Massachusetts “eviction moratorium” law, which protected most tenants from being evicted during the COVID-19 crisis, ended in the fall of 2020. However, [some tenants in Massachusetts](#) are now protected by a new order from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) that halts evictions for low and middle-income tenants who don’t pay their rent and [meet certain other conditions](#). The CDC order will be in effect until March 31, 2021. (*Mass. Law Reform Institute, Mass. Housing Courts*)

#### 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.

*Current as of January 25, 2021*