



MAYOR GINA-LOUISE SCIARRA

City of Northampton
Office of the Mayor

210 Main Street Room 12
Northampton, MA 01060-3199
(413) 587-1249 Fax: (413) 587-1275
mayor@northamptonma.gov

May 3, 2022

Northampton City Council
210 Main Street, Room 3
Northampton, MA 01060

To the Honorable Members of the City Council,

Pursuant to my authority under Article 6, Section 6-1 of the City Charter, I am respectfully submitting the attached Administrative Order making the following four changes to the City's Administrative Code:

(1) Revised Title of Health Department to Health and Human Services Department and Director to Commissioner

My first proposed revision to the Administrative Code is under Section 3.0 Health and Human Services Division to change the title of the Health Department to the Health and Human Services Department.

For the last decade, the Northampton Health Department has systematically responded to increased demand for a more comprehensive definition and approach to public health. The Health Department was an early adopter of regional approaches, striving to meet needs impacting people, families, and businesses. The department has built a multi-skilled dynamic staff, securing millions of dollars in grant funding, and enabling a more holistic response to the needs of local residents and service providers, adding value to the City's infrastructure, reputation, fiscal assets, and continued funding opportunities.

Prior to 2015, the Health Department had five staff, equivalent to three full-time employees, who principally provided communicable disease monitoring and surveillance as well as inspectional services. Director O'Leary and then-Mayor Narkewicz recognized how critical a comprehensive approach to behavioral health is to citywide health outcomes, and together they began to enhance the types of services offered and seek resources to expand public health services.

In 2015, the City of Northampton recognized the need to respond to the opioid epidemic and started what has become Hampshire HOPE and DART. Hampshire HOPE is a countywide convener for people who — based on employment, activism, or personal experiences — are dedicated to reducing opioid overdoses and improving conditions for people struggling with opioid use disorders. Since 2018, using federal funding and with the help of many partners, Hampshire HOPE has distributed about 4,800 two-dose packages of the overdose-reversal drug Naloxone. The HOPE coalition has also supported the efforts of the offices of the Northwestern District Attorney and the Hampshire County Sheriff in getting unneeded prescriptions out of medicine cabinets to prevent misuse. HOPE also helped to launch the Northampton Recovery Center through visioning sessions organized by HOPE; installed Naloboxes (essentially first aid boxes containing naloxone and other supplies) in municipal buildings, libraries, schools and businesses; and played a role in community events to raise awareness about overdose, addiction and recovery issues.

The Health Department also built the Drug Addiction and Recovery Team (DART), which is a federally funded regional program nationally recognized as a public safety/public health collaboration. DART is a network of first responders, recovery coaches, and harm reduction specialists that provides free support to people with substance use disorder and their families. DART has grown to work with family members and expanded to communities in Hampden and Berkshire counties. Originally piloted in Northampton, DART is now in 45 communities in western Massachusetts and serves as a model for other county public health departments across the United States.

Next, in 2017 the Health Department sought funding for and developed the Health Information Exchange database (HIE), providing for the first time the ability to track critical health information. The HIE database is in the process of compiling regional and state data such as emergency department overdose data, and it will bring on new partners over the course of the database expansion and will make certain types of data more rapidly available than previously possible such as Massachusetts Department of Public Health data. This will allow partners to access information that could help aid decision-making or eventually lead to real-time evaluation of new interventions to assess the impact. Contributing partners include municipalities, healthcare providers, allies with shared initiatives, agencies, and a host of other community sector leaders. The HIE aggregates HIPAA-compliant, secure health data with considerations for data integrity and ethics using encryption, and municipal level firewall systems. All regional partners can have access to region-specific, aggregate-level data.

The arrival in early 2020 of the COVID-19 pandemic radically altered expectations for local public health responses across the country, and significantly so for the Northampton Health Department, which had already established itself as a regional leader in creating sound health policy for Hampshire County. Leaders from every sector - government, schools, businesses, public safety, and others looked to the Northampton Health Department and Director O'Leary for guidance on the best approach for a consistent and safe response to the health crisis. The Health Department responded with policies that provided a basis for a sound response across the state, and a package of efforts to mitigate the spread

of the virus through a response that included regulations, contact tracing, testing, vaccinations, community nursing, a homeless shelter at Northampton high school and later First Churches, and data collection that facilitated accurate disease surveillance.

The Covid-19 pandemic has shown the world the critical importance of public health and underscored the need for a transition already underway - that from an inspectional services department to a comprehensive public health and human services department.

Additionally, in recognition of this expanded role, I propose changing the title of Health Director to that of Commissioner of Health and Human Services to better reflect the comprehensive approach to public health required.

(2) Creation of the Community Care Department under the Health and Human Services Department

I am very proud that in my first Administrative Order as Mayor, I am bringing forward the creation of the Community Care Department, which codifies the department in our city code. In the FY22 Budget book, the implementation budget for the Department of Community Care was situated under the Division of Health and Human Services. This initial placement by former Mayor Narkewicz was a choice informed by the work of the 15-member Northampton Policing Review Commission (NPRC), appointed jointly by the Mayor and City Council to conduct a community conversation and public policy review about policing and community safety.

In the NPRC's final report entitled "Reimagining Safety" issued on March 18, 2021, one of the primary recommendations was the creation of a municipal Department of Community Care to provide civilian, non-armed responses to mental health, substance use, and other crises. The NPRC recommended that the "...department be intentionally independent from the Northampton Police Department but open to collaboration with all City departments." Additionally, they "...advocate[d] that the department be situated underneath the Board of Health" because of the recognition of racism as a health crisis and also to give the department "access to highly trained professionals who have experience with some of the most vulnerable residents of Northampton while simultaneously serving the majority of the population as well."

This Administrative Order affirms the choice made in FY22 in the placement of the Community Care Department in our structure for the organization of the General Fund Budget. Additionally and substantially, this Administrative Order fulfills the NPRC recommendation by codifying the Community Care Department and situating it under the proposed Health and Human Services Department, as a critical part of the city's human service delivery and response apparatus for a comprehensive public health approach.

(3) Adjusted Numbering of Department of Veterans' Services

This revision is to adjust for the creation and insertion of the Community Care Department at 3.02 under the 3.01 Health and Human Services Department. The Department of Veterans' Services will become 3.03, with no further revision.

(4) Revised Authorities and Responsibilities for the Board of Health to reflect change in title of the Health Department to Health and Human Services

This revision changes the title from Health Department to Health and Human Services under Section 12.0 for the Board of Health's authorities and responsibilities regarding the Health Department.

Thank you in advance for your review of these proposed changes to our Administrative Code. I stand ready to answer any questions or provide additional information and respectfully request the City Council's approval of the attached Administrative Order.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Gina-Louise Sciarra".

Gina-Louise Sciarra
Mayor

cc: City Clerk