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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**CORONAVIRUS UPDATE FROM THE CITY OF NORTH ADAMS AND NORTH ADAMS PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

NORTH ADAMS, MA (March 10, 2020) – As of March 10, 2020, there were seven (7) presumptive positive COVID-19 (Coronavirus) cases in Berkshire County, and 92 total presumptive cases statewide. Local health officials, including the Public Health Nurse and staff at the Berkshire Health Alliance will continue to conduct contact investigations of confirmed and presumptive positive COVID-19 cases, in collaboration with MDPH. This helps to prevent further spread by asking those who came in contact with presumptive patients to self-quarantine. These agencies remain the primary points of contact for any communicable disease outbreaks, informed by state and federal agencies.

At a planning and preparedness meeting held on Tuesday, March 10, 2020, representatives from Northern Berkshire EMS reported that in order to ensure the safety of the local emergency response workforce, EMS personnel and other first responders will follow an updated set of dispatch and patient contact protocols. This means that the way that patients and caregivers interact with EMS staff may look different but will not cause delays in emergency response or the quality of care received from EMS.

In addition, Governor Charlie Baker declared a state of emergency in Massachusetts on Tuesday, March 10, 2020 in order to provide greater flexibility to respond to this disease outbreak.

Locally, at the direction of the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH), North Adams City Councilor Jason LaForest entered quarantine on Tuesday, March 10, 2020, after being tested for exposure to the COVID-19 Coronavirus after developing mild symptoms Tuesday morning. Following consultation with MDPH and City Health Department staff, North Adams Mayor Tom Bernard, who attended weekend social functions with Councilor LaForest, voluntarily elected to work from home pending the results of the councilor's test.

“Over the past few days we’ve heard many people use the phrase ‘abundance of caution,’ and that’s guiding my self-isolation decision,” said Mayor Bernard. “As community leaders,

Councilor LaForest and I have an obligation to model best practices in following the instructions of state and local public health officials. I want to thank MDPH and the North Adams Health Department for their guidance in this matter,” the mayor added.

“As a father, nurse, and elected official, I take precautions for the transmission of and illness extremely seriously,” Councilor LaForest said. “Hopefully my symptoms are related to a simple cold and not the COVID-19 virus. Please continue to follow handwashing and best health practices. I wish all those dealing with this virus a quick recovery.”

With news about coronavirus changing rapidly, we encourage everyone to follow steps to prevent the spread of infection. Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, avoid touching your eyes and face, and cough or sneeze into a tissue or your elbow. In addition, please follow the recommendation to stay at home if you are feeling sick, and contact your primary healthcare provider if your symptoms worsen.

Anyone who is experiencing a fever and respiratory illness and is concerned they have either come into contact with the virus or traveled to an affected country within the last 14 days is advised to contact their primary health care provider. In addition, the national Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has released updated recommendations for people at higher risk — older adults and people who have chronic medical conditions like heart disease, diabetes, lung disease: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/specific-groups/high-risk-complications.html>.

As previously announced the NAPS facilities staff cleaned and disinfected the schools over the weekend prior to opening on Monday. District facilities staff will continue to follow heightened cleaning protocols at all schools, with a focus on high touch points. The district also is closely monitoring hand towels and soap dispensers to ensure regular refill and has purchased a large supply of hand sanitizer to be distributed to all schools. In addition, the Superintendent of Schools is canceling schoolwide events, field trips, and all related workshops and seminars for 30 days, through April 17, 2020. The school department plans to continue all classes and internal business until further notice.

We understand that hearing news of cases of COVID-19 in our community will be unsettling for some residents and visitors. City and school district staff remain committed to providing a rational, measured, commonsense response, and clear, consistent, and timely information to answer questions, allay fears, and prepare for what continues to be an evolving public health concern.

The Mayor, the Superintendent of Schools, and staff from Public Safety, Public Services, and other city departments continue to review and update our response, operations, and communication plans as this situation continues to evolve. We also are working closing with other communities, first responders, and the Regional Emergency Planning Committee (REPC) to share information, best practices, and recommendations. We also will continue to use local media, social media, and our Code Red system as needed to provide information, updates, and special instructions.