Dear [NAME OF LEGISLATOR],

I am writing to ask you to oppose the passage of S.1334/H.2204—also known as the “Statewide Accelerated Public Health for Every Community Act” (SAPHE) 2.0— as currently drafted, and to request that this bill be returned to committee for further study or amended to address the defects/issues outlined below.

On its face, this bill has several major defects:

* The bill will create what is likely to become a large and expensive new state bureaucracy. Initially, the state will rely on federal funds provided through the ARPA program (the “American Rescue Plan Act of 2021”). However, these funds are only temporarily available. What will be the ongoing impact on state finances and individual taxpayers once federal funding is no longer available?
* The bill will disempower local boards of health to manage their own local situations; instead, it will, in essence, put local boards of health that accept SAPHE funding under the jurisdiction of the MA Dept. of Public Health and Dept. of Environmental Protection, both far removed from local issues and needs. Are local town boards of health and local citizens aware of the loss of autonomy this bill would entail and have they been consulted?
* The bill grants very broad, ill-defined powers—without legislative oversight, oversight by elected officials, or public involvement—to either of only two government officials (the Commissioners of Public Health and of Environmental Protection) to organize “the public health response” to an “outbreak of a disease or health care situation important to the public health affecting more than 1 board of health” (lines 130-134 of the bill).

What constitutes an “outbreak of a disease or health care situation important to the public health”? What kinds of “public health response”? Could that response include lockdowns? School and business closures? Testing, tracking and tracing? Masking? Vaccine mandates?

* The bill potentially opens up the possibility of increased surveillance and tracking of individuals and consequent further erosion of medical and personal privacy in the name of dealing with public health situations.

Before a large, new expensive state bureaucracy is established, the Massachusetts legislature needs to (1) carefully research the actual costs to taxpayers of maintaining a new public health bureaucracy once federal funding is no longer available, (2) determine whether granting broad emergency powers to unelected officials without oversight and public involvement is in the public interest, (3) determine whether disempowering local boards of health is in the public interest, and (4) determine whether the bill will adversely impact individual privacy.

Thank you for your consideration.

 [NAME OF CONSTITUENT]