



**Commonwealth of Massachusetts Executive Department
Office of Governor Deval L. Patrick
Press Release**

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**PATRICK-MURRAY ADMINISTRATION ANNOUNCES
MASSACHUSETTS STORM ASSISTANCE CENTERS FOR
COMMUNITIES IMPACTED BY TORNADOES**

State agencies to offer support services in Springfield, Palmer, Southbridge

BOSTON – Friday, June 3, 2011 – The Patrick-Murray Administration today announced the opening of three Massachusetts Storm Assistance Centers in Springfield, Palmer and Southbridge that will provide vital supports for individuals and families impacted by severe weather in the region earlier this week. Governor Deval Patrick has called on agencies across state government to work collaboratively to meet the immediate health, human service, housing and employment needs of those affected by the storms.

"The people I have met over the past couple of days are shaken, but resilient, and ready to rebuild their lives. By consolidating all available services in one place, these Storm Assistance Centers will make it easier for them to do just that," said Governor Patrick. "We stand alongside those affected by these devastating storms to help wherever we can."

"While visiting these communities following the devastating storm, the Governor and I witnessed first-hand the incredible work of public safety officials and first responders," said Lieutenant Governor Timothy Murray. "As these communities recover and rebuild, these storm assistance centers will provide individuals, families, neighborhoods and the business community with the critical resources that they all need right now."

"In the wake of this horrific disaster, these recovery centers will offer vital services and bring much-needed relief to folks who have endured so much over these past few days," said Senator John Kerry. "There's a lot of work to be done, but we're prepared to do everything in our power to help the people of Springfield rebuild their community and move forward with their lives."

"As we work together to move forward from this disaster, I encourage Massachusetts residents impacted by the severe weather to take advantage of these resources," said Senator Scott Brown. "While the damage inflicted was truly devastating, I am hopeful these Centers will be a valuable tool as we begin the re-building process."

"Having visited every community impacted by the tornados, I know firsthand that many people need help. These Centers will provide critical assistance and is another indication that the recovery process has begun. But I will continue to do everything I can to help the people of western and central Massachusetts who are in need," said Congressman Richard E. Neal.

"I commend Governor Patrick for taking quick action to help the children and families in need. No one could have imagined the devastation in western and central Massachusetts on Wednesday left by violent storms and tornadoes," said Senate President Therese Murray. "Our hearts go out to those who have lost so much and the families and loved ones of those who were killed and injured. We must all work together and support our fellow citizens during this difficult time."

"I applaud the Administration for opening these support centers," said House Speaker Robert A. DeLeo. "I plan to work closely with Governor Patrick, Senate President Murray, and the Representatives of the cities and towns struck by this disaster to alleviate the pain, suffering and damage caused by Wednesday's tornadoes. This is something we're going to work on together for as long as it takes to make these communities whole again."

Agencies of the Executive Offices of Health and Human Services, Housing and Economic Development, and Labor and Workforce Development will be on site in all three communities and will offer meetings with area residents to help them resolve their urgent needs for health, nutrition, housing and employment services.

Secretary of Health and Human Services Dr. JudyAnn Bigby has sent representatives from the Departments of Transitional Assistance, Mental Health, Public Health and Veterans' Services; and the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind to each of the centers to provide personalized assistance to impacted residents.

"We are ready to provide a range of health and human service supports to the individuals and families who were affected by these powerful storms," said Secretary Bigby. "Our dedicated staff are committed to supporting those who have suffered difficult losses and enrolling them in services and programs for which they may be eligible." Staff will be on site to help individuals and families obtain cash assistance and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits, seek crisis counseling support services, and enroll in a range of other available benefits.

Secretary of Housing and Economic Development Greg Bialecki will ensure that the storm assistance centers will be staffed by public and private sector economic development leaders and non-profit partners who can offer impacted businesses and homeowners advice on available state and federal resources that can assist with repairs, rebuilding and relocation. Additionally, the Division of Insurance will also be represented by experts who can help guide consumers through the insurance claims process. The Administration is also working with landlords to secure temporary office space for impacted businesses in downtown Springfield.

"Our homeowners and business owners are the backbone of our communities and we are committed to connecting them with the resources that are available so they can rebuild," said Secretary of Housing and Economic Development Greg Bialecki. "These centers will offer guidance on a wide array of assistance, from Small Business Administration funding to business relocation and reopening tools to tips on how to file insurance claims. We stand behind all of the people whose lives and livelihoods have been uprooted and we will not rest until everyone is back on their feet."

Secretary of Labor and Workforce Development Joanne F. Goldstein has dispatched the state's Rapid Response team to help staff each of the three centers. The Rapid Response teams will assist impacted employees with filing for unemployment benefits and include a Spanish speaker

at each center. Additionally, a business representative will be available to discuss programs and grant opportunities available to employers and businesses impacted by the storm.

"During this time of need, it is important to provide fast and easy access to unemployment benefits and job training opportunities to those employees impacted by the storms," said Secretary Goldstein.

Individuals and families impacted by the storms are encouraged to visit one of three new Massachusetts Storm Assistance Centers listed below. The Centers will be open today from 3:00 – 6:00 p.m. and 8:00 a.m. - 6:00 p.m. thereafter, including Saturday and Sunday, until further notice:

Springfield: Department of Transitional Assistance Office
95 Liberty Street, Springfield
(413) 858-1000

Palmer: Department of Developmental Service Central/West Regional Office
171 State Avenue, Palmer, 01069
(413) 283-3411 or (800) 323-3123

Southbridge: Department of Transitional Assistance Office
1 North Street, Southbridge
(508) 765-2400

The Governor declared a state of emergency in Massachusetts on Wednesday following tornado activity that produced high winds, significant property damage, power outages and loss of life. This declaration was amended Thursday to include only those four counties hit hardest by the storms: Worcester County, Hampshire County, Hampden County and Franklin County.

Since the storms passed through Massachusetts on Wednesday evening, the Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency (MEMA) has coordinated federal, state, local, voluntary and private resources following the disaster.