

CHARLIE BAKER
Governor



KARYN POLITO
Lt. Governor

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CONTACT

Brendan Moss, Governor's Office
brendan.c.moss@massmail.state.ma.us

Colleen Arons, Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development
colleen.aronson@mass.gov



**Baker-Polito Administration Announces Additional Support for
Business Recovery in Merrimack Valley**

*Expanded technical assistance and new grant programs will leverage \$10 million from
Columbia Gas*

BOSTON – Today, Governor Charlie Baker, North Andover Town Manager Andrew Maylor, Lawrence Mayor Daniel Rivera, Andover Town Manager Andrew Flanagan and Elizabeth Foley, Vice President, Columbia Gas announced plans for leveraging \$10 million in additional funding from the company to continue to support business recovery efforts in the Merrimack Valley.

There are more than 600 businesses in North Andover, Lawrence and Andover impacted by the recent disaster, and the funding program announced today addresses both immediate and longer-term opportunities to support their recovery.

“Since the tragedy in the Merrimack Valley, our administration has focused on providing assistance to those who have been impacted to help them get back to normal as quickly as possible,” **said Governor Charlie Baker**. “The additional support announced today will help speed up the recovery process for affected residents and businesses.”

“Delivering technical support and emergency funds will help businesses in North Andover, Lawrence and Andover reopen sooner,” **said Lt. Governor Karyn Polito**. “This funding enables us to expand emergency assistance to individual businesses, and fund local programs that will support business recovery for the long-term.”

Funding will be spread across three major areas:

- \$2 million for direct technical and other business support
- \$6 million for municipal discretion for business support and economic development
- \$2 million for longer-term regional support for economic development

The \$2 million for technical assistance and other business support will continue the on-the-ground efforts [announced by the Baker-Polito Administration in October](#), which engages local organizations to provide flexible direct support services for impacted businesses. The additional funds will enable providers such as Mill Cities Community Investments (MCCI) and Eparatodos/eforall to amplify technical assistance, including bookkeeping, staffing, inventory management, claims submissions, business development, etc. The new fund will also support marketing efforts to attract business to the businesses in the three impacted communities.

“While we remain focused on restoring gas service to all those businesses and residents who have not yet been re-lit, we must also transition to assisting businesses that have been adversely impacted,” **said North Andover Town Manager Andrew Maylor**. “The announcement today of \$10 million in additional support, specifically up to \$2 million for direct support to each municipality, to offset the economic impact this disaster has had in local economic development is huge.”

“Lawrence is the proud home to a large, diverse and vibrant business community with an indomitable spirit,” **said Lawrence Mayor Daniel Rivera**. “This new funding program will infuse new energy in our collective effort to get back to business, including reminding consumers near and wide all that Lawrence businesses have to offer.”

“Andover’s businesses are critical to our local economy and community. As the recovery continues, I am pleased that funding will be available to celebrate and strengthen our local businesses,” **said Andover Town Manager Andrew Flanagan**. “Moving forward, I look forward to discussing with our community how we can best position Andover businesses for not only the duration of the recovery, but for long-term sustainability and success. This community-wide effort will embrace the critical importance of our downtown, shopping centers and the entire business community that was affected.”

\$6 million will be directed to support municipality-driven business support and economic development, with grants provided to Lawrence, North Andover and Andover to fund efforts to strengthen the local business community. Essex County Community Foundation (ECCF), the administrator of the [Greater Lawrence Disaster Relief Fund](#), will serve as the fiduciary agent and the grant program will be implemented through the Lawrence Partnership. The Lawrence Partnership will work with each municipality on awarding up to \$2 million in grants focused on their local business community. Municipalities have immediate access to the grant program application.

“At ECCF, we are privileged to be a partner in supporting the recovery of the business communities affected. This multi-pronged effort ensures immediate acute support, as well as, longer term “systems” solutions that will result in resiliency and thrive-ability,” **said ECCF COO and VP of Community Leadership Stratton Lloyd.** “ECCF is fully committed to Lawrence, Andover and North Andover and their rapid recovery.”

“As the generator of local jobs, local wealth and local identity, our businesses are the heart of our regional economy, and this crisis has hit them especially hard,” **said Lawrence Partnership Executive Director Derek Mitchell.** “This investment will help ensure that they are stronger in the future than they were before the gas crisis hit, strengthening the ecosystem of support that helps businesses start, grow and build resilience.”

The remaining \$2 million will be reserved for longer-term regional economic development, such as planning and development of a business ecosystem, with specific focus on rebounding from disaster, marketing/PR effort to drive customers to the region, and the comprehensive systems-approach of connected services. Strategy and investment decisions will be managed by a regional advisory council with balanced representation of each of the three municipalities, the business community and other stakeholders. The Lawrence Partnership will staff the regional advisory council in its capacity as project manager, and will include appropriate members of ECCF.

“Throughout our effort in the restoration process in the Merrimack Valley, we have seen first-hand the viability that local businesses bring to each of the three impacted communities,” **said Elizabeth Foley, Vice President, Columbia Gas of Massachusetts.** “We pledge our continued support to restore these businesses and are proud to invest in long-term economic development and growth opportunities for the region.”

Today’s announcement builds on programs rolled out this fall, including the [\\$3 million emergency loan fund](#), that directly support business recovery in Lawrence, North Andover and Andover since the gas explosions of September 13.

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Support for Merrimack Valley Businesses Impacted by Gas Explosions:

Emergency Loan Fund – [launched on September 28](#), the emergency loan fund provides individual businesses up to \$50,000 to bridge the gap of claim processing and payouts. The loan is structured as an advance against the claim filed and paid out from proceeds of the claim, with a provision that if the claim does not cover the full amount of the loan, the remaining balance will be amortized. The loan is at 0% interest and no payments for the first 6 months. Any residual balance on the loan not covered by the claim will be amortized up to 3 years at Prime plus three. [Recapitalized with the support of numerous financial institutions and \\$750,000 from Columbia Gas on October 24](#), the fund is now \$3 million.

SBA Economic Injury Disaster Loans – up to \$2 million – This program administered by the SBA is available for uninsured or otherwise uncompensated losses. It provides relief from economic injury caused directly by the disaster and permits the business or private nonprofit to maintain a reasonable working capital position during the period affected by the disaster. These loans do not replace lost sales or revenue. [Announced October 24.](#)

Technical Assistance – a consortium of Technical Assistance (TA) providers is reaching out to all identified commercially-metered business customers, self-identified or otherwise known business customers, and referred business customers. After an intake and needs assessment, the TA then refers the business to the appropriate support whether it be Columbia Gas for claims, a loan, or business support for HR, preparing documentation to file a claim, etc.

Business Assistance – up to \$10,000 – This fund, established in the amount of \$500,000 on November 2 through a donation by Columbia Gas, will issue immediate relief to businesses who do not meet loan underwriting standards, or who are struggling to produce claims documentation and need working capital to remain viable. The business is required to work with a TA provider on its documentation, and will assign the claim to MCCI, administrator of the fund.

Back to Business Initiative – [Columbia Gas announced 'Back to Business' on October 17](#), connecting each of the impacted businesses with a dedicated team to support business restoration efforts.

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