



Office of
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Commonwealth of Massachusetts

For Immediate Release

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Representative Kane reviews legislative accomplishments at mid-session

BOSTON – Reflecting on the first half of the 2015-2016 legislative session, State Representative Hannah E. Kane (R-Shrewsbury), noted that it was a productive year marked by many significant legislative accomplishments, although several challenges remain to be addressed in the year ahead.

Since the 189th General Court convened on January 7, nearly 6,000 bills have been filed in the House of Representatives and the Senate. Although the Legislature was on its winter recess last month, there was still work going on at the State House, as the 27 joint legislative committees, 11 House committees and 13 Senate committees continued to review, analyze and hold public hearings on these bills. The House and Senate also meet in informal sessions during the recess to advance local home rule petitions and other non-controversial matters.

“The House Republican Caucus has always placed a priority on fiscal responsibility and accountability to the state’s taxpayers, while also promoting a strong state-municipal partnership,” said Representative Kane who currently serves on the Joint Committee on Transportation, the Joint Committee on Public Health, the House Committee on Redistricting and the House Committee on Personal and Administration. “That philosophy has guided me in every vote I’ve taken as a legislator, and will continue to inform my actions on behalf of the residents of the 11th Worcester District.”

Representative Kane noted that the caucus continues to hold monthly meetings with Governor Charlie Baker and Lieutenant Governor Karyn Polito to discuss policy and other issues that directly impact the residents of the Commonwealth. She also cited the opioid issue and education of as some of her key priorities for the current legislative session.

Representative Kane is backing Governor Baker’s proposed opioid bill (House Bill 3817) to put even more tools into the hands of the frontline workers who are dealing with this epidemic. The Governor’s bill – which calls for a multi-pronged approach that focuses on education,

prevention, intervention, treatment and recovery – was heard by the Joint Committee on Mental Health and Substance Abuse on November 16 and has drawn the unanimous support of the House Republican Caucus.

Representative Kane's commitment to combatting the opioid crisis has influenced another priority of hers regarding the impending 2016 ballot question regarding the legalization of recreational marijuana use in Massachusetts. While several bills have been filed in the House of Representatives and the Senate regarding marijuana legalization, it is likely the ballot question will be the most direct path toward legalization. As an opponent to legalizing marijuana for recreational use, Representative Kane is working to ensure the public has all the correct information to make an educated decision on this ballot initiative, should it come to a vote.

In regard to education, Representative Kane continues to learn more about the Governor's bill that proposes raising the cap on charter schools in Massachusetts. She is actively working to connect local officials and educators with policy analyst in order to ensure communication about financial impacts this bill may cause to cities and towns. Additionally, Representative Kane remains cognizant of the ballot initiatives regarding common core as well as the recent announcement of MCAS 2.0 testing and will continue to stay apprised of these issues in the coming year.

The Fiscal Year 2016 state budget signed on July 17th was the first in 8 years to not include a draw down from the state Stabilization Fund, which is used to mitigate cuts to essential programs during economic downturns. The fund's balance now stands at \$1.25 billion, following the deposit of an additional \$120 million into the fund through a fall supplemental budget. That supplemental budget also contained \$113 million for debt defeasance, allowing the state to save millions in interest by paying down some of its outstanding debt earlier than scheduled.

While many important issues will be taken up on Beacon Hill when the legislators meet again in formal session, Representative Kane's first priority remains the several local bills and constituent interest legislation she has been working on and will continue to advocate for in 2016. Currently, she has filed two local home rule petition's regarding liquor licensing for the towns of Shrewsbury and Westborough as well as co-sponsored a home rule petition requesting the Division of Capital Asset Management and Maintenance convey land on the East and West side of Green Street to the Town of Shrewsbury. Representative Kane also welcomes discourse with Shrewsbury and Westborough's local officials on the Governor's municipal modernization bill as a means to increase the effectiveness of local government.

Additionally, Representative Kane, working with the MetroWest and Central MA delegation caucuses heavily advocated that MADOT re-prioritize the I-495/I-90 Interchange Improvements as the move to All Electronic Tolling will exacerbate the public safety concerns and increased congestion at one of the busiest interchanges on the Mass Turnpike. Rep. Kane was very pleased that in November, MADOT issued an RFP for completing the design up to 25% and work on permitting.

Representative Kane nominated Shrewsbury Town Manager Dan Morgado to serve as one of the Governor's municipal appointments on the Suburban Edge Commission. The commission's

purpose is to investigate and study communities in the MetroWest/495 Area defined as “suburban edge communities”. The commission will aim to study the developmental challenges these communities have, such as issues addressing transportation, water, cellular, and energy infrastructure, transit services, residential development, reuse of former industrial facilities and historic mills, brownfields reclamation, downtown redevelopment and other such constraints. The commission will hold at least 3 public forums in the region to solicit stakeholders’ feedback before developing policy responses and recommendations to ensure that edge communities can participate in state development initiatives and benefit from state resources.

This year’s budget contained significant funding increases in local aid for cities and towns, including:

- \$4.5 billion in Chapter 70 education aid, an increase of \$111.2 million;
- \$979.8 million in unrestricted general government aid, an increase of \$34 million;
- \$271.7 million for the special education Circuit Breaker, an increase of \$18.3 million, which funds the state’s share of special education aid for local school districts at 75%;
- \$59 million for regional school transportation, an increase of \$7.5 million; and
- \$80.5 million set aside for charter school reimbursements to cities and towns, an increase of \$3.6 million.

Moving forward, Representative Kane anticipates further discussion of a new report issued by the Foundation Budget Review Commission, which concluded that the Commonwealth needs to make an additional investment of \$432 million in Chapter 70 aid to ensure that school districts can meet their financial obligations for employee health insurance and special education. The commission has recommended that insurance costs be factored into the foundation budget formula and that the in-district and out-of-district special education rates be adjusted to reflect what school districts are actually paying for these services.

In addition to local aid increases, the Fiscal Year 2016 budget contained several key transportation reforms to put the MBTA back on a solid financial footing and to ensure proper oversight of the authority’s operations moving forward. The budget expanded the MassDOT Board of Directors from 7 to 11 members, and created a 5-member Fiscal Management Control Board that will remain in place until June 30, 2018, with an option allowing the board to continue for another two years beyond that date if needed.

As a member of the Joint Committee on Transportation, Representative Kane said one of the most significant transportation reforms included in the budget is a three-year moratorium on the Pacheco Law, which will provide the MBTA with more flexibility to determine whether certain operations can be outsourced at a savings to the state’s taxpayers. A recent report issued by the Pioneer Institute estimates the MBTA has foregone nearly \$500 million in savings since the late 1990s due to the restrictions imposed by this anti-privatization law.

After being appointed to the K-12 Subcommittee for State Treasurer Goldberg’s Financial Literacy Task Force, Representative Kane was among the speakers at the Task Force’s recent

unveiling of their 2015 Report on Financial Literacy in Massachusetts. The K-12 Subcommittee focused on Massachusetts' failing grade for financial literacy among students and brainstormed how to raise financial awareness and literacy. Recommendations from the committee included developing methods of evaluating personal finance decision-making skills for K-12 students. Through collaboration with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, the task force recommends connecting educators with financial education training to ensure they are equipped with up to date financial knowledge that can be passed on to their students. Additionally, the creation of programs and the development of incentives for K-12 educational institutions were recommended in order to encourage learning activities as well as the continuous sharing of information and best practices among educators.

With an average of four people dying from an opioid overdose in Massachusetts every day, Representative Kane, a member of the Central MA Opioid Task Force, has been working closely with her colleagues to address the terrible scourge of substance abuse that is tearing apart families and communities across the state. Last year alone, 1,089 people died from opioid use in Massachusetts, representing a 20% increase over the previous calendar year. Tragically, the number of people projected to die from opioid use this year is even greater.

In response to this public health crisis, the Fiscal Year 2016 state budget included funding for:

- opioid prevention grants
- the establishment of two new recovery high schools;
- new clinical stabilization beds for detox treatment; and
- the creation of a municipal bulk purchasing program to provide first responders with the anti-overdose drug Narcan at reduced costs

The November supplemental budget also contained nearly \$30 million in additional funding for substance abuse prevention and treatment, including new treatment beds.

Representative Kane cited other key policy and funding initiatives approved by the House of Representatives and signed into law this session. Those initiatives include:

- **Fentanyl trafficking** – The Legislature enacted a fentanyl trafficking bill on November 18 that imposes a prison sentence of up to 20 years for manufacturing, distributing or dispensing more than 10 grams of fentanyl or any of its derivatives. Previously, individuals could only be charged for the lesser crime of fentanyl possession, yet this synthetic painkiller, which is 50-100 times more potent than morphine, has been linked to multiple fatal overdose deaths in Massachusetts and across the country.
- **Sex offender classification** – Led by House Minority Leader Bradley H. Jones, Jr. (R-North Reading), the House Republican Caucus successfully passed legislation limiting the amount of time Level 2 and Level 3 sex offenders can secure a stay of final classification pending a court appeal, and mandating an expedited hearing process whenever a stay is granted. These changes, signed into law by Governor Baker on October 27, will help preserve the public's ability to access information about convicted

sex offenders living and working in their community who are considered to be at a high risk of re-offending.

- **Stolen Valor Act** – The Legislature recently honored our state’s veterans for their service to our county by enacting a statewide “Stolen Valor Act” to prosecute individuals who falsely claim to be a veteran or recipient of a military honor in order to obtain money, property or other tangible benefits. Individuals who falsely claim military service credentials for personal financial gain can now be charged with a gross misdemeanor, which carries a penalty of up to one year in a house of correction, a fine of \$1,000, or both a fine and imprisonment.
- **Veterans graves protection** – The Legislature passed legislation filed by Representative Paul Frost (R-Auburn) that imposes a fine of up to \$5,000 for the unauthorized sale, retention or disposal of a veteran’s grave marker, with repeat offenders subject to an additional punishment of up to 5 years in state prison or up to 2 ½ years in a house of correction. Another bill filed by Representative Todd Smola (R-Warren) and signed into law requires vandals who desecrate a gravestone or veteran’s grave marker to pay restitution to the property owner, in addition to facing a fine of up to \$5,000 and up to 5 years’ imprisonment in the state prison or up to 2 ½ years’ imprisonment in a jail or house of correction.
- **Purple Heart fee waivers** – Legislation signed by Governor Baker on November 23 allows Purple Heart recipients to visit any state park, forest recreation area and reservation without having to pay any charges or fees. This waiver previously applied only to disabled veterans and handicapped persons.
- **DCF reform** – The Legislature has taken steps to support the Baker-Polito Administration’s efforts to implement reforms at the Department of Children and Families to ensure the protection of children entrusted to the state’s care. The Fiscal Year 2016 budget included a \$35.5 million funding increase for DCF for the hiring of new social workers to help reduce the agency’s caseload. The fall supplemental budget included an additional \$2.2 million to address immediate staffing and training needs at DCF, along with a \$1 million reserve to provide training and supports for foster families and adoptive families.

Representative Kane also noted that the House of Representatives passed other important policy initiatives this year which are still awaiting final action. These include:

- **Public records reform** – This bill establishes specific timelines for municipalities and state agencies to comply with public document requests; sets limits on the extensions allowed for complying with these requests; caps the hourly rates and copying fees that can be charged for producing these documents; and allows individuals whose requests for documents are denied to seek legal relief through the superior court system, which can award “reasonable attorney fees and other litigation costs,” along with punitive damages ranging from \$1,000-\$5,000. This bill – which represents the first significant updating of

the state's public records law in more than 40 years – is now before the Senate awaiting further action.

- **Net metering cap** – Before recessing for the holidays, the House also approved legislation to encourage more solar energy projects across the state by raising the private net metering cap from 4% to 6% and the public net metering cap from 5% to 7%. Massachusetts currently offers incentives to businesses and municipalities that produce solar power by allowing them to sell this energy back to the grid at retail rates. The House proposal calls for transitioning to a new “market net metering credit” equal to the average wholesale rate of electricity, while allowing utilities to offset the costs of maintaining their infrastructure by charging a “monthly minimum reliability contribution” to solar users.

The Senate recently passed its own solar energy bill, which also calls for a 2% increase in the net metering cap but does not provide for a monthly minimum reliability contribution and maintains solar subsidies at higher rates for an extended period of time than the House does. A six-member Conference Committee is currently working to try to reconcile the differences between the two versions of the bill.

Looking ahead to the 2016 legislative session, Representative Kane noted that the House is expected to take up a more comprehensive energy bill once the second half of the legislative session gets underway, as well as Governor Baker's municipal modernization bill to eliminate or update obsolete laws impacting cities and towns; promote local independence in areas such as the issuance of liquor licenses; streamline state oversight, particularly when it comes to local tax assessments and abatements; and provide municipalities with greater flexibility in short-term borrowing and procurement practices.

Other major policy issues likely to come up for debate next year include proposals to mandate hands-free cell phone use when driving; bring Massachusetts into compliance with the federal REAL ID Act; regulate fantasy sports and ride-sharing services like Uber and Lyft; raise the charter school cap to allow for up to 12 new and/or expanded charter schools a year in districts performing in the bottom 25% of all districts statewide; consider potential MBTA fare increases; and promote economic development throughout the Commonwealth.

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