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Representative Kane Announces Formation of Massachusetts Legislature’s Food System Caucus

Representative Kane a Founding Member and House Co-Chair

BOSTON – State Representative Hannah Kane, (R-Shrewsbury), has joined with her House and Senate colleagues at the outset of the 191st Session of the Great and General Court to form the Massachusetts Legislature’s Food System Caucus. Representative Kane is a Co-Chair of the bi-cameral, bi-partisan Caucus, which counts one-third of the entire Legislature as members. Joining Representative Kane as fellow Co-Chairs are the Caucus’ five fellow founding members, Representatives Dan Donahue and Paul Schmid and Senators Jo Comerford, Anne Gobi and Eric Lesser.

The Food System Caucus was founded with a mission to support and grow the local food system in the Commonwealth. The following three primary areas, which were identified as priorities in the Commonwealth’s Massachusetts Local Food Action Plan adopted in 2015, will serve as the Caucus’ focus:

- **Food access/insecurity:** reducing waste, hunger and food insecurity while making available fresh, healthy food to everyone who lives in the Commonwealth.
- **Farmland:** protecting the land and resources necessary to produce food, while maximizing the environmental benefits of agriculture and fishing, and the preservation of agricultural land.
- **Economic development:** recognizing the significant impact to local, regional and state economies, supporting the increase of production, sales and consumption of Massachusetts grown food and creating jobs and improving wages in food and farming.

United by the importance of advancing the Commonwealth’s local food system and a shared commitment to that mission, the Caucus includes members from every region of Massachusetts, with representation from the North Shore to the Berkshires and Worcester County to the Outer Cape. Together, the Food System Caucus will seek to advance policies and practices in Massachusetts which tackle hunger and reduce food waste, preserve land and natural resources while also maximizing the environmental benefits of agriculture, and promote

Massachusetts-produced food and the economic development of the state's food sector. In addition, the key external partner to the Caucus is Winton Pitcoff, Director of the Massachusetts Food System Collaborative, who will help ensure the Caucus priorities are aligned with and supportive of the Local Food Action Plan and that the Caucus priorities are disseminated to advocates and advocacy organizations for support across the Commonwealth.

The impact of the food system in Massachusetts is significant:

- About 1 in 10 workers in MA (426,000) are employed in the food system.
- The food system accounts for about 4.5% of all economic activity in the state.
- MA residents spend about \$32 billion on food each year.
- Food processing revenue is about 10% of the states manufacturing revenue.
- There are 41,000 food businesses in MA and approximately 7,800 farms

“As a young child who grew up in Maine near many local farms and now as a designee of the Massachusetts Food Policy Council, founding the Legislature's Food System Caucus with my colleagues was a natural decision,” stated Representative Kane. “Our Commonwealth's food system plays a vital role in our economy, environment, and the public health and wellbeing of all our citizens. I am eager to further partner with fellow Caucus members and invaluable stakeholder and advocacy groups on this policy area. I remain determined to reduce systemic food waste and tackle hunger while supporting our local farms and farmers, and I look forward to advocating for my bill, H.1475 *An Act encouraging the donation of food to persons in need*, and the balance of the Caucus priority legislation and endorsed bills this session.”

The Food System Caucus has designated the below six pieces of legislation as Caucus priority bills for the 191st General Court:

Food access/insecurity:

H145/S48 *An Act relative to an agricultural healthy incentives program* (Rep. Mark & Sen. Gobi)

H1475/S869 *An Act encouraging the donation of food to persons in need* (Rep. Kane & Sen. Comerford)

H591/S267 *An Act regarding breakfast after the bell* (Rep. Vega & Sen. DiDomenico)

Farmland:

H873 *An Act to promote healthy soils and agricultural innovation in the Commonwealth* (Rep. Schmid & Sen. Comerford)

S482 *An Act regarding a farmland protection and viability plan* (Sen. Gobi)

Economic Development:

S301 *An Act establishing farm to school grants to promote healthy eating and strengthen the agricultural economy* (Sen. Lesser)

In addition to legislative priorities, the Caucus will advocate for increased funding in the state budget for line-items that advance the mission. At the beginning of March, the Food System Caucus distributed a letter signed by 76 Representatives and delivered to House Ways and Means Chair Aaron Michlewitz requesting \$8.5 million in funding for the state's Healthy Incentives Program (HIP) in Fiscal Year 2020. Founded in late 2017, HIP supports local farms and the Commonwealth's agricultural economy while also improving public health outcomes by providing vulnerable families and individuals with access to otherwise unaffordable fresh, healthy and local fruits and vegetables via SNAP incentives. To date, the Healthy Incentives Program has yielded \$9 million in sales for over 200 farms across the Commonwealth and provided over 55,000 families and individuals with HIP incentives, demonstrating a cost-effective public-private partnership.

With the support of advocacy organizations and stakeholder partners, the Food System Caucus will continue to champion innovative, impactful and effective policies to advance the Massachusetts food system, to the benefit of residents and businesses in each of the Commonwealth's 351 cities and towns.

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