



COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS
THE GENERAL COURT
STATE HOUSE, BOSTON 02133-1053

For Immediate Release
7 February 2020

Contact: Representative Hannah Kane, 617-722-2810

89 State Lawmakers send Baker-Polito Administration bi-partisan, bi-cameral letter underscoring “deep disappointment” over Healthy Incentives Program (HIP) suspension

Legislature’s Food System Caucus Focuses on HIP at 1st Annual Meeting

Boston, MA — Eighty-nine State lawmakers have sent a letter to the Baker-Polito Administration underscoring their “deep disappointment” at the Administration's abrupt decision to suspend the Healthy Incentives Program (HIP) from February until May 2020. The letter also notes strong support for HIP to operate year-round.

This is an effort of the bi-partisan, bi-cameral Food Systems Caucus (FSC) which was launched one year ago and is now the second largest caucus in the Massachusetts Legislature, following the Democratic Caucuses in the House and Senate.

House Co-chair, **Representative Hannah Kane** (R-Shrewsbury) noted, “It has been an honor to work with my fellow co-chairs to grow the Caucus to 127 legislators so that we can collectively provide a greater voice of advocacy inside the Legislature for our caucus priorities – food access/insecurity, farmland and economic development. Our bi-partisan, bi-cameral Caucus is united in our desire to pass legislation and support in our budget process ways to improve the lives of our most vulnerable residents, sustain and grow our agricultural and marine fisheries economy and preserve farmland. We will also continue our relentless advocacy for the Healthy Incentives Program (HIP) and will welcome the Administration’s agreement for a more collaborative approach to best determine how to structure and sustain this vital program which supports all of our Caucus priorities.”

Excerpts from the letter read:

“We write as members of the Food System Caucus (FSC) to express our deep disappointment in the manner in which the Healthy Incentives Program (HIP) operational suspension was announced and deeply regret that DTA did not work to alert the Legislature well in advance of the suspension that additional funds were needed to prevent the program suspension.

We share the goal of ensuring that HIP does not again experience an operational suspension and the goal of expanding access, yet we believe that a year-around program best supports the goal of providing fresh, nutritious, locally grown food to consumers who are food-insecure and it supports our local farmers in better crop rotation, field utilization and year-around cash flow.”

Co-chair, **Senator Jo Comerford** (D-Northampton) added, “HIP is a triple win: It’s highly-effective at battling food insecurity. It’s an economic boost for struggling farmers. And it bolsters local economies. HIP has significant support from both Republicans and Democrats and in both the House and the Senate. The Administration should be leaning into the program and expanding it, instead of acting to significantly curtail its impact.”

The letter also reaffirms the Administration’s stated commitment to including the Food System Caucus in the stakeholder working group that the Caucus asked the Administration to convene to work collaboratively to structure and sustain the Healthy Incentives Program moving ahead.

HIP is one of the FSC’s major priorities in a line-up that includes soil health, reducing food waste, farm to school programming, and more.

Co-chair **Senator Eric Lesser** (D-Longmeadow) stated, “It has been a joy to work with such a committed and creative group of colleagues, advocates and experts this past year. Moving forward, our Caucus is committed to expanding the Healthy Incentive Program to year-round service and ensuring every family in our Commonwealth has access to fresh, local food.”

Co-chair **Senator Anne Gobi** (D-Spencer) noted, “HIP has the support from legislators, farmers, consumers and advocates from every region of the Commonwealth. As a caucus we are committed to the long-term sustainability of the program and will continue to work with the administration to make that a reality.”

Co-chair, **Representative Paul Schmid** (D-Westport), offered, “Healthy food for all, without regard to where you live. Massachusetts will lead the nation, as we have on education and health care.”

House Co-chair, **Representative Dan Donahue** (D-Worcester) sums it up well, “In our first year as a Caucus, we have had a lot on our plate. I am proud of the work the membership and co-chairs have been able to accomplish; our collective effort has raised the profile of food system issues in the State House.”

Information about the FSC available here: <https://www.mafoodsystemcaucus.com/>.

###