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Legislature Passes American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), FY21 Surplus Spending Bill

Investments focus on communities hard hit by COVID-19 and supporting the ongoing economic recovery

(BOSTON—12/06/2021) On Friday, December 3, the Massachusetts Legislature advanced a \$4 billion bill to Governor Baker’s desk that directs federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) and Fiscal Year 2021 (FY21) surplus funding to assist the Commonwealth’s ongoing economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. With a focus on making equitable investments and prioritizing communities disproportionately impacted by the pandemic, the legislation delivers targeted support to workers and businesses, housing, health care, mental and behavioral health, climate preparedness, education, and workforce development.

“I am glad that after such a long process we have now passed legislation that will make vital funds available for communities and individuals who have been especially hard hit by the COVID-19 pandemic,” said Senator Michael Moore (D-Millbury). “We were presented with a unique opportunity with these funds, which has allowed us to make crucial investments into many different areas, such as behavioral health, climate change resiliency, and small businesses, among many others. I’d like to thank my colleagues in the Senate as well as our partners in the House for their efforts in getting this bill brought before the Governor’s desk.”

Earlier this year, the Legislature voted to transfer the state’s \$4.8 billion allocation from ARPA, which must be allocated by 2024, into a separate fund to ensure stakeholder and resident engagement in a public process. Following six public hearings and more than a thousand pieces of testimony received, the House and Senate spending proposals were unanimously approved by each chamber, resulting in the compromise bill which is now on the Governor’s desk. This bill utilizes \$2.55 billion in ARPA funds and \$1.45 billion in FY21 surplus funds.

Within the ARPA Spending Bill, Senator Moore was able to secure \$205,000 for Shrewsbury Youth and Family Services. District and statewide the Senator was also able to allocate \$1 million for the Massachusetts Military Support Foundation, as well as \$2 million for the Massachusetts Food Trust Program, which will be focused on communities disproportionately impacted by COVID-19.

Representative Kane secured \$75,000 for Shrewsbury to establish a food bank and related programs to be operated by the Town in partnership with private non-profit organizations currently operating on a limited basis and \$50,000 for heating, ventilation, and air conditioning upgrades for Shrewsbury Public Schools.

Representative Kane also worked alongside colleagues Representative Garlick and Senator Comerford to secure \$200M for local public health as part of the SAPHE initiative they have been working on in the Legislature and her colleagues in the Food System Caucus to help secure \$44.8M in food security and system investments.

“The final ARPA bill represents months of work, compromise, and advocacy from countless stakeholders, and I am very grateful to everyone who played a part in securing these massive investments for the benefit of the Commonwealth. I am especially thankful to Senator Moore, who served as a partner in the Senate to secure important line items for Shrewsbury that will aid our community in recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic,” remarked Representative Kane.

Further notable investments included in the bill are as follows:

Economic Recovery and Workforce Development

- \$500 million for premium pay bonuses for essential workers, up to \$2,000 per worker
- \$500 million for the Unemployment Insurance Trust Fund, providing necessary relief to business
- \$100 million for vocational school infrastructure and capacity building needs
- \$37.5 million for the Workforce Competitiveness Trust Fund to support organizations working with people displaced from jobs during the pandemic, historically underserved populations, and individuals reentering their communities from the corrections system
- \$50 million for equitable and affordable broadband access and infrastructure improvements to close the digital divide
- \$135 million for Mass Cultural Council to support the cultural sector
- \$75 million for small businesses, including \$50 million for direct grants to historically underserved populations and minority-owned, women-owned, and veteran-owned small businesses and \$25 million for nascent businesses
- \$15 million for regional high-demand workforce training at community colleges
- \$25 million for the expansion of Career Technical Institutes
- \$24.5 million for workforce development and capital assistance grants to the Massachusetts Alliance of Boys & Girls Clubs and the Alliance of Massachusetts YMCAs, as well \$4.5 million for the YWCAs
- \$20 million for the resettlement of Afghan evacuees and Haitian evacuees
- \$15 million to enhance and diversify the cybersecurity sector with partnerships between public higher education institutions and private businesses
- \$14 million for agricultural economy supports
- \$10 million for regional tourism councils

Affordable Housing and Homeownership

- \$150 million for supportive housing, including \$65 million for the chronically homeless population, and \$20 million to increase geographic equity and accessibility related to the continuum of long-term care services for veterans not primarily served by the Soldiers’ Homes in Chelsea or Holyoke
- \$150 million for public housing authorities to maintain and upgrade existing infrastructure
- \$115 million for the Commonwealth Builder Program to support housing production and promote homeownership among residents of disproportionately impacted communities
- \$115 million for affordable rental housing production and preservation for the workforce and low- and moderate-income individuals
- \$65 million for homeownership assistance tools, including down payment assistance, and mortgage interest subsidy supports

Mental and Behavioral Health, Public Health and Health Care

- \$400 million in mental and behavioral health supports, including \$122 million for workforce loan repayment programs for behavioral health and substance use professionals
- \$300 million for the Home and Community-Based Services Federal Investment Fund to address workforce needs for those caring for vulnerable populations
- \$200.1 million to support the state's local and regional public health infrastructure
- \$260 million for acute hospitals impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic
- \$44.8 million for food security infrastructure, including \$17 million for the Greater Boston Food Bank for regional food security network improvements across the Commonwealth, \$5 million for the Food Bank of Western Massachusetts, \$2 million for the Massachusetts Food Trust Program to provide loans, grants and technical assistance in a regionally equitable manner to communities disproportionately impacted by COVID-19, \$1.92 million for Project Bread to better connect eligible unenrolled residents with federal nutrition programs statewide and \$1 million for the Massachusetts Military Support Foundation, Inc. for the operation of empowerment centers and to support the distribution of food to veterans in need
- \$30 million to support a robust and diverse home health care and human service workforce through recruitment, retention, and loan forgiveness programming
- \$50 million for nursing facilities, including \$25 million for capital support to increase the quality of patient care and \$25 million for workforce initiatives
- \$25million for youth-at-risk supports and grant programs for community violence prevention and re-entry organizations, focused on communities disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic
- \$25million for youth summer and school-year jobs
- \$5 million for Health Care For All to conduct a community-based MassHealth redetermination and vaccination outreach, education, and access campaign targeted in communities disproportionately impacted by the pandemic
- \$5 million for the Disabled Persons Protection Commission to study and review the interrelationship between service-providing agencies for individuals with disabilities within the Commonwealth and to design and implement a system for an interconnected network that will provide a continuum of care for those individuals
- \$2 million for unreimbursed COVID-19 costs for Early Intervention providers
- \$500,000 to establish transportation services for participants in the Massachusetts Veterans' Treatment Courts

Climate Preparedness

- \$100 million for water and sewer infrastructure investments through the Clean Water Trust
- \$100 million for environmental infrastructure grants, including the Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) program
- \$90 million for marine port infrastructure investments focused on the promotion of offshore wind development
- \$25 million for Greening the Gateway Cities program to support tree planting
- \$15 million for parks and recreational assets
- \$7.5 million for community colleges to help train underserved populations for green jobs
- \$6.5 million for clean energy retrofitting in affordable housing units
- \$5 million for the advancement of geothermal technologies

Education

- \$100 million to improve indoor air-quality in schools and support healthy learning environments for grants to public school districts with high concentrations of low-income students, English language learners, and communities disproportionately impacted by COVID-19
- \$75 million for capital and maintenance projects for higher education
- \$25 million for the Endowment Incentive Program at the University of Massachusetts, state universities and community colleges
- \$20 million for special education, including \$10 million for workforce development
- \$10 million for programs focused on recruiting and retaining educators of color

Accountability and Oversight

To support communities disproportionately impacted by the pandemic and prioritize historically underserved populations, the bill establishes an equity and accountability review panel for federal funds to track in near real-time the amount and percentage of ARPA funds spent in these communities and awarded to minority-owned and women-owned business enterprises. The bill also takes steps to ensure minority-owned and women-owned business have fair participation on procurements issued under the act.

Having passed the House and Senate, the compromise legislation now advances to the governor's desk for consideration.

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