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Rep. Kane supports extending outdoor dining and cocktails-to-go as part of \$1.6B supplemental budget

BOSTON – State Representative Hannah Kane (R- Shrewsbury) recently supported a proposal to allow restaurants to continue providing outdoor dining and cocktails-to-go with takeout orders until the spring of 2023 as part of a \$1.6 billion supplemental budget.

The spending plan, filed as House Bill 4532, also provides \$700 million to fund a wide range of COVID-related treatment and vaccination initiatives, including testing in schools and congregate care settings, and extends the state's emergency eviction protections to March 31, 2023. The bill was engrossed by the House of Representatives on a vote of 156-0 on March 9.

Representative Kane noted that the actual cost of the supplemental budget to the state will be less than \$1.6 billion, as many of the spending items included in the bill are eligible for federal reimbursement. When the initial bill was released by House Ways and Means prior to debate, it was estimated that the actual cost to the state will be \$842 million, or about half of the original bill's bottom line.

An additional \$6.75 million in spending was added to the bill through the amendment process, \$5 million of which will be allocated to the federal Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), with the remaining \$1.75 million in funding going to the state's Department of Fire Services.

During floor debate, Representative Kane supported an amendment, filed by Representative Kelly Pease (R-Westfield) to add \$100 million to the Chapter 90 municipal road and bridge program to assist cities and towns, but the amendment was defeated on a roll call vote of 28-128. She also supported an amendment, filed by Representative Peter Durant (R-Spencer), to provide relief to the state's motorists by suspending the 24 cents per gallon gas excise tax until the average cost of a gallon of unleaded gas falls below \$3.70, but the amendment was defeated on a voice vote.

Under House Bill 4532, restaurants will be allowed to continue offering outdoor dining as well as certain alcoholic drinks as part of a food takeout order until April 1, 2023. Initiated during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 to support Massachusetts' businesses, the outdoor dining provisions are currently scheduled to expire on April 1, while the ability to offer beer, wine and mixed drinks with food takeout orders is set to expire on May 1.

The House proposal also includes \$100 million to provide grant funding to municipalities as part of a winter recovery assistance program, which will be distributed using a formula based on local road miles.

Representative Kane noted that this funding can be used for reconstructing, resurfacing, and striping roads, as well as for repairing or replacing traffic lights, signage, guardrails and storm grates.

Other spending initiatives contained in the bill include:

- \$100 million for the Rental Assistance for Families in Transition (RAFT) program
- \$2.8 million for shelters servicing homeless individuals
- \$359,154 for climate adaptation and preparedness
- \$140 million in grants for special education schools to help address the impacts of COVID-19 and its variants
- \$8.4 million for guardianship, foster care, adoption, family preservation and kinship services provided by the Department of Children and Families
- \$1.66 million for DCR's state parks and recreation division
- \$8 million for early intervention services
- \$5 million for the Department of Public Health's Suicide Prevention and Intervention Program
- \$5 million for adult mental health and support services
- \$10 million for emergency aid to the elderly, disabled and children
- \$500,000 for the Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women
- \$10 million to assist with the resettlement of Ukrainian refugees and immigrants
- \$108.3 million for collective bargaining costs

The supplemental budget now heads to the Senate for its consideration.

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