



Office of
Representative Hannah E. Kane
Commonwealth of Massachusetts

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CONTACT: Sophia Flionis, 617-722-2810
sophia.flionis@mahouse.gov

Representative Kane supports passage of \$52.7 billion state budget for Fiscal Year 2023

BOSTON – State Representative Hannah Kane, R- Shrewsbury, recently supported the passage of a \$52.7 billion state budget for Fiscal Year 2023 (FY23).

House Bill 5050 represents a compromise spending plan negotiated by a six-member conference that worked to resolve the differences between the initial House and Senate versions of the budget that were passed in April and May, respectively. Filed by the conference committee on July 17, House Bill 5050 was enacted by both legislative branches on July 18 and is now on Governor Charlie Baker’s desk for his review and signature.

Representative Kane noted that the budget includes \$5.9 billion in Chapter 70 education aid for cities, towns and regional school districts, along with \$1.23 billion in unrestricted general government aid (UGGA) to support other essential municipal program and services. This represents an increase of nearly \$495 million in Chapter 70 aid and just over \$63 million in UGGA funds compared to last year.

According to Representative Kane, the local aid increases contained in the new budget will provide additional local aid to the Eleventh Worcester District for the new fiscal year that began on July 1. Under House Bill 5050, Shrewsbury will receive \$20,613,148 in direct education aid and \$3,226,898 in unrestricted state aid. Westborough will receive \$11,506,107 in direct education aid and \$1,342,383 in unrestricted state aid.

The FY23 budget also includes funding for several local projects Representative Kane advocated for throughout the budget process. Those initiatives include: \$50,000 for Shrewsbury Youth and Family Services, Inc. for their continued implementation across the Commonwealth of the National Council for Behavioral Health’s Youth Mental Health First Aid program, \$69,000 to the town of Shrewsbury for the purchase of new voting machines, \$25,400 to the town of Shrewsbury for firefighter physical examinations, and \$40,400 for the Westborough Fire Department for an equipment washer and commercial washer/dryers.

Representative Kane also worked alongside her colleague Senator Comerford (D-Northampton) to secure \$15 million in the budget for local and regional public health efforts.

The FY23 budget contains funding increases for several educational programs that provide state reimbursement to cities and towns. The Special Education Circuit Breaker is funded at \$441 million, or \$67.7 million more than last year, while municipal charter school reimbursements are funded at \$243.8 million, an increase of \$89.2 million compared to last year. Regional school transportation is level-funded at \$82.2 million but homeless student transportation is increased by \$8.5 million, to a total of \$22.9 million.

Other funding highlights from the budget include:

- a \$1.4 billion transfer to the state’s Stabilization Fund, bringing the total to approximately \$7.35 billion to help preserve essential state programs during future economic downturns;
- \$250 million in grants to support and stabilize the state’s early education and care workforce and to address operational costs at Massachusetts child care programs;
- \$175 million to support a High-Quality Early Education & Care Affordability Fund;
- \$60 million for a reimbursement rate increase for center-based subsidized early education and care;
- an additional \$150 million for a reserve to fund the continued implementation of the 2019 Student Opportunity Act, bringing the total to \$500 million;
- \$15 million to encourage Massachusetts public university graduates to work as public school teachers, with half of this funding earmarked for the Tomorrow’s Educators Scholarship Program;
- \$115 million to expand the state’s “Breakfast After The Bell” program;
- \$15 million for bullying prevention;
- \$42.7 million for elder protective services;
- \$24.8 million for grants to local Councils on Aging;
- \$12 million for the elder nutrition program;
- \$266 million to assist the MBTA in addressing ongoing safety concerns, with the Massachusetts Department of Transportation required to issue monthly reports to the Legislature detailing the agency’s progress in responding to the findings of the Federal Transit Administration;
- \$175 million in higher education scholarships;
- \$14.3 million for a new State Police class;
- \$9.5 million for veterans outreach centers;
- \$626,490 for the women’s veterans outreach program;
- \$4.2 million for veterans homeless shelters and services;
- \$68.2 million to reimburse cities and towns for veterans’ benefits;
- \$8.7 million for special projects relating to the Commonwealth’s state parks and recreational areas;
- \$16 million in state aid for municipal libraries;
- \$12 million for the Healthy Incentives Program;
- \$360,000 for a Post Partum Depression Pilot Program;
- \$218 million for the Bureau of Substance Abuse Services; and
- \$15 million for One Stop Career Centers

To help address the continued high levels of food insecurity, the budget includes emergency food assistance funding of \$30.5 million and \$12 million for the Healthy Incentives Program (plus rolling over any unused funding from this FY). The FY23 budget also includes \$250,000 for Local Food Policy Councils, \$650,000 for UMass Extension, and \$110 million to continue to provide universal free school meals for Massachusetts students now that the federal program has ended. These investments were top priorities of the Legislature’s Food System Caucus of which Rep. Kane is a Co-founder and Co-chair.

The FY23 budget also contains several major policy initiatives, including:

- a ban on child marriage in Massachusetts, which is currently allowed under state law if the child’s parents grant permission;
- the establishment of a common application for residents seeking assistance through a variety of state-administered programs, including MassHealth;
- the expansion of the Massachusetts Victim and Witness Assistance Board from 5 to 7 members so that 3 of the members will be crime victims rather than the 1 victim who currently serves on the board;
- the creation of a special commission to study oral health, identify gaps in care, and improve oral health care access and quality of care; and

- a directive requiring the Secretary of Health and Human Service, in consultation with the Department of Higher Education, to conduct a public information campaign to raise awareness of the availability of student loan forgiveness and assistance, tuition reimbursement, fellowships and other state and federal programs available to those working in or considering working in the health care and behavioral health sector.

Governor Baker has 10 days to review the budget, and he maintains line item veto powers, as well as the ability to return sections of the budget to the House and Senate with proposed amendments.

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