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For Immediate Release

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House, Senate give Board of Elementary and Secondary Education the power to waive MCAS requirements

BOSTON – The House of Representatives and the Senate have approved legislation authorizing the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education to waive MCAS testing requirements for the 2019-2020 academic year due to the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 global pandemic and the ongoing State of Emergency in Massachusetts.

State Representative Hannah Kane (R-Shrewsbury) said that in addition to the proposed MCAS changes, House Bill 4616, *An Act to further address challenges faced by municipalities, school districts and state authorities resulting from COVID-19*, would also allow regional school districts to delay finalizing a Fiscal Year 2021 budget beyond June 30, and extend the deadline for school districts to file progress reports mandated by the 2019 Student Opportunity Act. The bill was enacted in both legislative branches on April 9, and is now on Governor Charlie Baker’s desk awaiting his signature.

“Permitting the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to waive the MCAS testing requirements for the 2019-2020 school year acknowledges the disruptive impact school closures caused by COVID-19 are having on our students and educators. While the ingenuity and hard work of our teachers and students to transition to remote learning and online platforms is most admirable, it is impracticable to plan for or prepare for MCAS in this learning environment and amidst so many unknowns,” remarked Representative Kane.

Under the bill, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education would be empowered to waive the requirements of the competency determination for high school graduation, with the recommendation of the Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education. High school seniors who are unable to take or complete a competency determination assessment administered in the spring of 2020 would be given the opportunity to take or retake the assessment at a later date.

The bill also mandates that the requirement for a comprehensive diagnostic assessment of individual students be waived for the remainder of the 2019-2020 school year.

Because some participating cities and towns may not be able to finalize a budget on time this year, House Bill 4616 would also permit regional school districts to suspend the statutorily-required vote on the approval of their Fiscal Year 2021 budget until after June 30. To provide for the continued operation of the regional school district in the absence of a completed budget, the Commissioner of Elementary

and Secondary Education would be authorized to certify one or more 1/12th interim budgets until a new budget is finalized.

Representative Kane noted that House Bill 4616 also moves the reporting date for schools to submit their first 3-year plan to close student achievement gaps, as mandated by the Student Opportunity Act passed last year. The bill sets the new reporting deadline for May 15, but allows the Commissioner to extend the date even further, if needed.

Additional provisions contained in House Bill 4616 include language:

- allowing for the in-person verification requirements to be suspended, waived, delayed or simplified for both the Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program and the Residential Assistance for Families in Transition (RAFT) program for the duration of the State of Emergency;
- moving the date by which the MBTA board must approve a preliminary budget from March 15 to May 15; and
- moving the date by which the MBTA must submit a final budget to the advisory board from April 15 to June 15.

House Bill 4616 includes an emergency preamble, which means it will take effect as soon as Governor Baker signs the bill.

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