



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 \$49.7 billion House budget for Fiscal Year 2023

BOSTON – State Representative Hannah Kane, R- Shrewsbury, recently supported a \$49.7 billion state budget for Fiscal Year 2023 that provides for increased local aid, significant funding investments in critical state programs, and the implementation of several major policy initiatives, including a ban on child marriage.

The preliminary budget proposal was engrossed by the House of Representative on a vote of 155-0 on April 27, following three days of debate on over 1,500 amendments.

The House budget provides just under \$6 billion in Chapter 70 education aid to cities and towns, which represents a \$494 million increase over current funding levels, and boosts minimum per pupil aid to \$60 per pupil. It also includes nearly \$1.2 billion in Unrestricted General Government Aid (UGGA) to support other essential municipal services. Representative Kane noted that under the House spending proposal, Shrewsbury will receive \$20,613,148 in direct education aid and \$3,144,235 in unrestricted state aid, and Westborough will receive \$11,506,107 in direct education aid and \$1,307,995 in unrestricted state aid, for the new fiscal year that begins July 1.

During floor debate on the budget, Representative Kane successfully advocated for the inclusion of several important local initiatives for her district, including \$40,400 in funding for the Westborough Fire Department to purchase an equipment washer and commercial washer/dryers to aid in sanitation, as well as \$50,000 for Shrewsbury Youth and Family Services towards the continued implementation of their Youth Mental Health First Aid Training Program across the Commonwealth.

Representative Kane noted that the House budget fully funds 2/6th of the goal rate for Chapter 70 funding to meet the state's obligations under the Student Opportunity Act (SOA). It also offers additional education support for municipalities by funding the Special Education Circuit Breaker at \$441 million, a \$47.3 million increase over the current fiscal year, while fully funding charter school aid at \$243.8 million, which represents an increase of \$89.2 million over current spending levels. Regional school transportation is funded at \$77.8 million, and homeless student transportation at \$22.9 million.

Other funding highlights from the budget include:

- \$85,000 for the NEADS Inc. service dogs for veterans program
- \$200.3 million for the elder home care program;
- \$11.8 million for the elder nutrition program;
- \$23.5 million for grants to local Councils on Aging, with a formula;
- a \$70 million rate increase for the state's childcare providers;

- \$16.5 million for Head Start Grants;
- \$115 million for the school breakfast program, including summer food programs;
- \$15 million for childcare resource and referral agencies;
- \$500,000 for the Genocide Education Trust Fund to support the development of curricular materials and professional development training related to teaching middle and high school students about the history of genocide;
- a \$20 million loan forgiveness program to support the Department of Mental Health workforce;
- \$7.5 million for the Tomorrow's Teachers program to provide scholarships for people committed to teaching in the public schools;
- \$156 million in higher education scholarship funding;
- \$326 million for state universities, \$337 million for community colleges, and \$653 million for the UMass system;
- \$17 million for the Workforce Competitiveness Trust Fund;
- \$15 million for One Stop Career Centers;
- \$188.6 million for the Bureau of Substance Addiction Services;
- \$12.5 million for behavioral health supports;
- \$48.3 million for early intervention services;
- \$10 million for the Healthy Incentives Program, plus a Prior Authorization to roll over remaining FY22 funds;
- \$150 million for the Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program;
- \$92 million for public housing subsidies;
- \$140 million for Residential Assistance to Families in Transition (RAFT);
- \$59.4 million for HomeBASE;
- \$5.1 million for climate adaptation and preparedness; and
- \$78.7 million for DCR state parks

Language was also inserted by adoption of Representative Kane's amendment that would allow funding that was previously set aside for a Massachusetts Women's Rights History Trail to remain available until June 30, 2023.

Citing strong state tax revenue collections, Representative Kane supported a series of tax relief amendments to help Massachusetts residents who are struggling with rising consumer prices, but all were defeated during floor debate. Among the tax relief measures voted on were proposals to:

- suspend the state gas tax for 60 days;
- suspend the gas tax until the average price reaches \$3.70 a gallon;
- double the estate tax threshold from \$1 million to \$2 million;
- reduce the tax rate on short-term capital gains from 12 percent to 5 percent;
- increase the Senior Circuit Breaker Tax Credit to \$1,755; and
- provide farms with a fuel tax rebate for the operation of farm equipment

While no tax relief measures were included in the final House budget, the spending proposal incorporates several new policy proposals, including language to ban child marriage, which is currently allowed under state law so long as the child's parents grant permission. According to Representative Kane, six other states already ban child marriage, including Rhode Island and New York, which passed laws to prohibit this practice in 2021.

The House budget also calls for incrementally increasing the \$2 million cap on the Conservation Land Tax Credit, which has helped preserve 14,110 acres of critical natural resources in Massachusetts as permanently protected open space, providing an important tool to help promote the Commonwealth's long-term climate

goals through carbon sequestration. Under the House proposal, the cap will increase to \$5 million over a three-year period to help address the current backlog of applications, with the \$2 million cap to be reinstated in 2034.

Another policy proposal included in the House budget calls for the development and implementation of a secure common application portal for individuals to simultaneously apply for state-administered needs-based benefits and services offered by a variety of state agencies. This includes MassHealth coverage, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), veterans' services benefits, childcare subsidies, housing subsidies, fuel assistance and other needs-based health care, nutrition and shelter benefits.

Additional language included in the House budget directs the Secretary of Health and Human Services to establish a centralized website by October 1, 2022, for the public to access a list and description of all state and federal programs for loan forgiveness or assistance, tuition reimbursement, fellowships or other workforce-related benefits in the health care and behavioral health industries.

In addition, the House budget directs the Health Policy Commission to conduct an analysis and issue a report on the ongoing effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on behavioral health-related boarding in acute care hospital settings, including boarding in emergency departments, medical surgical units and observation units. The commission is due to report by July 1, 2023, with its recommendations on how to address the burden on acute care hospitals, outcomes for patients with behavioral diagnoses, and the quality of care for patients boarded in acute care settings.

The budget now moves to the Senate, which is expected to begin debating its own spending proposal in late May.

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