



Office of
Representative Hannah E. Kane
Commonwealth of Massachusetts

For Immediate Release

Contact: Anna Darrow, 617-722-2810, Anna.Darrow@mahouse.gov

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Rep. Kane supports \$3.8B COVID relief bill

BOSTON – State Representative Hannah Kane, R-Shrewsbury, recently supported a multi-billion-dollar COVID relief bill that makes significant investments in housing, economic development, workforce training, health and human services, education, and the environment, while also addressing food insecurity issues and financing a wide range of local initiatives across the state.

House Bill 4219, *An Act relative to immediate COVID-19 recovery needs*, as initially released from the House Ways and Means Committee, utilized \$2.5 billion Massachusetts received from the federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) and \$1.15 billion from the state's FY21 budget surplus, prior to adoption of amendments. The bill was engrossed by the House of Representatives on a vote of 159-0 on October 29.

House members spent two days considering over 1,100 amendments filed to the bill. Through this process, Representative Kane was able to secure funding for several projects in her district, including \$75,000 for food insecurity in Shrewsbury, \$50,000 for Shrewsbury Public Schools for heating, ventilation, and air conditioning upgrades, and \$25,000 for the Westborough Food Pantry to provide assistance to those experiencing food insecurity.

The original version of House Bill 4219 released from House Ways and Means allocated \$600 million for housing initiatives, \$750 million for workforce programming, \$777 million for economic development, \$765 million for health and human services programs, \$265 million for education, and \$350 million for the environment and climate resiliency efforts. An additional \$173.6 million in spending was added through the amendment process. To ensure accountability and transparency, the bill provides the Inspector General's office with \$5 million to develop a database so the public can easily track how the ARPA money is being spent, including the number of projects awarded to minority-owned businesses and organizations. The Food System Caucus, of which Representative Kane is a Co-Chair, had advocated for funding for the Food Security Infrastructure Grant program and \$78M was included in the base bill. Representative Kane was also a lead advocate in securing \$150M for strengthening the Commonwealth's local public health system in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Representative Kane noted the bill offers financial assistance to both businesses and workers impacted by the pandemic. In addition to investing \$500 million to offset unemployment insurance costs, House Bill 4219 provides \$200 million in tax relief to small businesses that were required to pay personal income taxes on COVID aid they received from the state or federal government. The bill also establishes a \$500 million premium pay program that will offer bonuses ranging from \$500 to \$2,000 for essential employees who continued to work in person during the pandemic, specifically those earning less than 300 percent of the federal poverty level, or about \$38,640 a year.

The bill also directs the Department of Unemployment Assistance (DUA) to establish a public information campaign to provide notice to all 2020 and 2021 UI claimants about the availability of an overpayment waiver.

As part of this outreach effort, DUA must provide information related to the right to request a waiver, eligibility requirements, the application process, and information about collection actions.

House Bill 4219 also includes a \$10 million transfer to the Community Preservation Trust Fund. This fund helps support historic preservation, affordable housing, and parks and open space across the Commonwealth.

The following are some of the other key provisions contained in the COVID-19 relief package, by category:

HOUSING

- \$200 million to promote homeownership opportunities, half of which is directed to residents of communities that were disproportionately impacted by the pandemic
- \$100 million for the creation of affordable rental housing
- \$150 million to rehabilitate and modernize state-aided public housing developments
- \$150 million to provide permanent supportive housing for the chronically homeless, domestic violence survivors, seniors and veterans

WORKFORCE

- \$150 million for workforce skills training, with priority given to those individuals who were laid off during the pandemic to help them re-engage in the workforce, including apprenticeship programs for low-income workers, adult basic education programs, rapid re-employment contracting and regional planning and equipment grants

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- \$60 million in grants for small businesses negatively impacted by the pandemic, including \$25 million set aside for those businesses that did not qualify for previous grants and \$35 million for businesses that focus on reaching underserved markets, along with minority-owned, women-owned and veteran-owned businesses
- \$125 million for a cultural assets reserve to assist cultural organizations and artists

HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

- \$150 million over three years for local and regional public health systems to address health disparities
- \$250 million for behavioral health programs, including \$100 million for initiatives ranging from student loan assistance and tuition reimbursements to workshop training programs
- \$250 million for community hospitals and \$20 million for community health centers to update and improve electronic health record systems
- \$70 million to update and modernize nursing facilities and address workforce shortages

EDUCATION

- \$25 million in endowment funds for the University of Massachusetts, state universities and community colleges
- \$100 million in grants for public school districts to improve ventilation and indoor air quality in their facilities
- \$100 million for the capital needs of existing vocational and career and technical schools
- \$10 million for grants distributed by and for the Alliance of Massachusetts YMCAs for workforce development and capital improvements to YMCA buildings and camps

ENVIRONMENT

- \$100 million for marine port development and offshore wind
- \$100 million for environmental infrastructure to help communities become more climate resilient
- \$100 million for water and sewer infrastructure improvements

- \$25 million for a forestry and tree planting greening program for projects on publicly owned land and land owned by non-profit organizations
- \$25 million for state parks and recreational facilities upgrades

MISCELLANEOUS

- \$78 million to address food insecurity across the Commonwealth
- \$50 million to close the digital divide for broadband and internet access in low-income areas
- \$15 million in prison re-entry grants to support individuals released during the pandemic
- \$10 million for community-based gun violence prevention programs in high-risk areas
- \$12 million to assist with the resettlement of Afghan refugees in the state

House Bill 4219, as amended, now moves to the Senate for its consideration.

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