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At midpoint of 2025-2026 legislative session, Rep. Kane highlights some of the major bills passed by the House last year

House GOP continues to advocate for more government accountability and transparency

BOSTON – As a new year gets underway, State Representative Hannah Kane (R-Shrewsbury) is highlighting some of the major pieces of legislation passed by the House during the first year of the 2025-2026 legislative session, as well as several key reform initiatives advocated for by the House Republican Caucus this session.

One of the first votes taken by the House in 2025 was on a Republican-sponsored amendment to a supplemental spending bill requiring all funding expended for providing services through the state's emergency housing assistance program to be subject to a competitive bidding process, a proposal that is now law. The vote came less than a year after the House Republican Caucus successfully advocated for a competitive bidding requirement for all food contracts related to the emergency shelter system, following reports of a no-bid contract that cost the state close to $10 million.

As in previous years, Representative Kane and the members of the House Republican Caucus continued in 2025 to push for meaningful reforms to the emergency housing assistance program, which has been costing the state's taxpayers approximately $1 billion annually due to the large influx of migrants seeking assistance under the state's right to shelter law. Some of these reforms include proposals to set a minimum residency requirement to qualify for services, which if adopted would help restore the program's original intent of prioritizing housing assistance for Massachusetts residents in need of services.

The House Republican Caucus was also successful in restoring a requirement that the Healey Administration provide ongoing updates disclosing how much the state is spending on the emergency shelter system, after the original reporting requirement implemented by legislators in 2023 expired on June 30. Language included in the Fiscal Year 2025 closeout supplemental budget, which was signed in November, requires full disclosure of all state spending on the shelter program moving forward as part of the bi-weekly reports issued by the Executive Office for Administration and Finance and the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities (EOHLC), as well as the detailing of all retroactive spending data dating back to July 1.

Representative Kane noted that the House in 2025 passed legislation that would require human trafficking awareness training for hospitality workers; provide $234 million in one-time financial support for fiscally strained hospitals and community health centers; and implement a formal licensing process for home care agencies operating in Massachusetts to help protect vulnerable clients receiving services.

Workplace safety issues were the focus of two bills engrossed by the House of Representatives last year. House Bill 4767 would take steps to address workplace violence within the health care industry by implementing stronger protections for health care workers, including mandatory training and enhanced reporting requirements.

While House Bill 4767 still awaits Senate approval, legislation to protect public transit workers from assault was signed into law in December. Chapter 79 of the Acts of 2025 adds these workers to an existing law that

provides penalties for assaulting a public employee while they are engaged in the performance of their duties, a crime that now carries a penalty of imprisonment for not less than 90 days and not more than 2½ years in a house of correction, a fine of between $500 and $5,000, or both a fine and imprisonment. The new law also creates the crime of assault and battery by means of a bodily substance.

Also signed into law last year was a proposal to extend pandemic-era laws allowing for hybrid and remote municipal meetings until June 30, 2027. Representative Kane said providing cities and towns with these options have helped to increase public participation in government deliberations at the local level over the last five years. The new law also extends until June 30, 2027 provisions reducing the number of individuals needed to constitute a Town Meeting quorum and authorizing representative Town Meetings to be conducted with remote participation.

Representative Kane noted that the House in 2025 also approved legislation to implement stronger child welfare protections designed to improve communication and coordination among state agencies working with the families of children in foster care or receiving state services. In addition to passing legislation to remove outdated and offensive language used to describe individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities from the General Laws, the House also endorsed a plan to restructure the Massachusetts Cannabis Control Commission in light of the ongoing dysfunction on the board.

In the area of education, the House unanimously approved legislation that would offer enhanced retirement benefits to certain qualifying teachers hired before July 1, 2001 through the RetirementPlus program. The House also passed the higher education BRIGHT Act (An Act to build resilient infrastructure to generate higher-ed transformation), which would provide $3.28 billion to help address deferred infrastructure maintenance and other modernization projects at Massachusetts's 29 public college and university campuses. Representative Kane said both bills are still pending before the Senate.

Attached below is more information on the House of Representatives' 2025 legislative agenda and many of the proposals put forth by the House Republican Caucus to promote greater transparency in state government and ensure enhanced accountability for the state's taxpayers.

SHELTER AND MIGRANT CRISIS – Throughout 2025, members of the House Republican Caucus continued to press for reforms to the emergency assistance shelter program to ensure greater transparency and accountability for the state's taxpayers.

On February 6, the Caucus collectively opposed House Bill 57, a supplemental spending bill calling for the infusion of an additional $425 million in shelter funding, arguing the state should not continue to keep pouring money into the program without first implementing significant reforms. Caucus members criticized the spending bill for containing minor, and in some cases temporary, reforms that will have little meaningful impact on the shelter program, which has been costing the state's taxpayers approximately $1 billion annually.

During floor debate on the bill, the Caucus put forth a series of reform measures to help enhance transparency, accountability, public safety and fiscal responsibility within the emergency shelter program. While the underlying bill requires individuals applying for emergency assistance housing benefits to disclose prior criminal convictions and calls for CORI checks prior to placement, these checks are limited to crimes committed in Massachusetts. To strengthen this requirement, the House Republican Caucus offered an amendment to mandate comprehensive universal background checks that will disclose criminal records at the state, federal and international levels to help keep dangerous criminals out of the shelter system. The amendment was rejected on a vote of 26-125.

To further enhance public safety in the Commonwealth, the House GOP Caucus offered several proposals to authorize the honoring of civil detainer requests issued by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE),

in response to the Supreme Judicial Court's 2017 Lunn ruling. The SJC ruled that Massachusetts law does not explicitly allow local law enforcement to hold someone based on a civil detainer request from ICE beyond the time they would otherwise be released from custody but said it would "defer to the legislature to establish and define that authority." These amendments would have allowed officials to keep dangerous criminals who are considered removable aliens by ICE – including those engaging in criminal street gang activity, human trafficking, rape and murder – in custody for anywhere from 12 to 48 hours but each amendment was ruled out of order by leadership as being beyond the scope of the bill. The House Republican Caucus doubted the ruling of the chair, but in each instance the ruling of the chair prevailed.

During floor debate, House Republicans also pushed for reducing the funding allocation for the emergency shelter program from $425 million to $200 million, arguing that the state auditor at the time was conducting a comprehensive audit of the program and noting that changes in immigration laws at the federal level should help to reduce the number of people coming to Massachusetts seeking shelter. The reduced funding would allow the state to continue to provide core services to Massachusetts residents in need while allowing additional time to see how the recent changes will impact enrollment. The amendment failed on a vote of 26-126.

In an attempt to restore the original intent of the state's right to shelter law, House Republicans also offered an amendment to limit program admissions to individuals who have established Massachusetts residency for at least 12 consecutive months immediately prior to the date of application. This minimum residency requirement would be waived for victims of domestic violence and for individuals whose living situation has been affected by a fire or other natural disaster that occurred in Massachusetts. Despite the support of all members of the House Republican Caucus, the amendment was defeated on a vote of 26-124. Additional amendments to limit shelter admission to residents and to individuals whose cause of homelessness resulted in Massachusetts were also defeated, one on a roll call vote of 25-127 and the other on a voice vote.

The one Republican amendment that was adopted during floor debate requires all funding expended for providing services through the emergency housing assistance program to be subject to a competitive bidding process, which passed on a vote of 152-0. In March of 2024, the House Republican Caucus successfully secured language in a previous supplemental budget imposing a competitive bidding requirement for all food contracts related to the emergency shelter system, following reports of a no-bid contract that cost the state close to $10 million. The new requirement will extend competitive bidding protections to all aspects of the emergency shelter system that receive state funding to help eliminate wasteful spending of taxpayer dollars.
House Bill 57 was signed into law on February 28 as Chapter 1 of the Acts of 2025 (https://malegislature.gov/Laws/SessionLaws/Acts/2025/Chapter1).

RULES REFORM ACCOUNTABILITY AND TRANSPARENCY – In 2025, the House Republican Caucus continued to push for reforms to the internal rules governing the Massachusetts House of Representatives and Senate, saying legislators need to be more transparent in how they conduct business and must be held accountable to their constituents.

On February 25, multiple Republican-sponsored reform measures were filed as amendments to a comprehensive House rules package as well as a separate rules package governing the operations of the joint legislative committees of the two branches for the 2025-2026 session. These reforms were designed to help shine more light on the legislative process and give constituents a better understanding of how the process works. Included among the House rules amendments were proposals to:

- mandate that the annual internal audit of the House be conducted by the state auditor, pursuant to the ballot question that was overwhelmingly approved by the state's voters last fall;
- require the House to comply with all such audits undertaken pursuant to the voter-approved law
- prohibit House committee polls from being open for less than two hours;

- require a 12-hour notice for members prior to a House poll being released;
- give members more time to review bills and file amendments before bills come to the floor for debate;
- provide members one hour to review consolidated amendments, which are often lengthy and detailed;
- require a two-thirds vote to extend sessions beyond 9 p.m.; and
- give House Ways and Means 60 days to approve or disapprove all bills referred to the committee (with the exception of the General Appropriations Act) and allow the bill's original sponsor to petition for the bill's release if the committee fails to act within the specified time frame.

Several Republican-sponsored amendments were filed to revise the joint rules, including proposals to:

- require roll call votes on conference committee reports, supplemental appropriations bills, and other substantive matters taken up in formal sessions conducted after July 31 in the second year of a legislative session;
- require a two-week notice of all matters to be taken up at a formal session conducted after July 31 in the second year of a legislative session;
- create a new joint rule requiring copies of audits of the General Court conducted by the state auditor to be published on the General Court website within 72 hours of receipt;
- require either branch of the General Court to request an opinion of the Supreme Judicial Court whenever they have a conflicting opinion with a constitutional officer relative to the constitutionality of legislation, such as the voter-approved legislative audit;
- prohibit joint committee polls from being open for less than two hours; and
- require a 12-hour notice for members prior to a joint committee poll being released.

The revised House rules now include two Republican-backed reforms, including a requirement that individual legislators' committee votes be posted online for easy public access, and a requirement that the House journal specify if a member participated in a vote remotely. The rules package also contains a requirement that House committees post bill summaries online prior to being taken up for a vote and that a minimum notice of 72 hours be provided for committee hearings. Legislators are also now required to be physically present to participate in a committee hearing, although members of the public can continue to participate remotely.

The new joint rules package incorporates several reforms the House Republican Caucus has long championed to improve transparency and make it easier for the public to participate in the legislative process. Although they are not perfect, the new joint rules represent a clear improvement over the previous rules by giving the public better access to, and understanding of, the legislative process through timely hearing notifications and the posting of information online.

Under the new joint rules, committees are required to provide a minimum of 10 days' hearing notice to the public, which is one week longer than the previous posting requirement of 72 hours. Any changes made to the posted hearing agendas must be made with the agreement of both committee chairs and posted at least 72 hours prior to the hearing.

These changes are particularly helpful for individuals who want to testify before a committee by providing sufficient advance notice in case they need to adjust their schedules. In addition, the public can continue to participate in hearings remotely and to submit testimony electronically, with hearings streamed live on the General Court website for those who can't come to the State House in person.

The new joint rules will allow members of the public to more easily access information on legislation as it makes its way through the process and will give them a better understanding of how their legislators are voting. For example, committee reports and votes will now be published online on the General Court website, along with committee members' attendance records (effective October 1). Committee chairs will be responsible for providing summaries of bills pending before their committee in easily understandable language for posting

online, and committees will also be required to make copies of written testimony publicly available, with certain exceptions to protect against the release of sensitive personal information.

The new rules allow the legislature to reconvene in formal session after July 31 of the second year of session, a time period normally reserved for informal sessions in which roll calls cannot take place, but this option will be limited to the consideration of conference committee reports, appropriations bills, and any vetoes or amendments recommended by the governor. The joint rules also require an outside independent audit of the legislature's joint financial accounts to be conducted by a certified public accountant each fiscal year.

REMOTE AND HYBRID MEETINGS EXTENSION – In March, the House and Senate agreed to authorize a two-year extension allowing cities and towns to continue to hold remote and hybrid meetings. House Bill 62, *An Act relative to extending certain COVID-19 measures adopted during the state of emergency*, was signed into law on March 28, just three days before the COVID-era law was due to expire, as Chapter 2 of the Acts of 2025 (https://malegislature.gov/Laws/SessionLaws/Acts/2025/Chapter2).

Municipalities now have the option of holding virtual public meetings until June 30, 2027. The law authorizing such meetings was first passed at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and later extended.

The new extension gives cities and towns the flexibility to conduct meetings in alternative formats that have helped to enhance public participation and promote greater transparency of government deliberations over the last five years. In addition to allowing the continued use of remote and hybrid meetings by select boards, school committees, and other public bodies, House Bill 62 also extends pandemic-era provisions reducing the number of individuals needed to constitute a Town Meeting quorum. The bill also allows for representative Town Meetings to be conducted with remote participation. Both provisions are subject to the same June 30, 2027 extension.

EDUCATION AND TRANSPORTATION INITIATIVES – On June 18, the House and Senate finalized a supplemental budget providing communities with additional special education circuit breaker funding and money for local road improvements as part of a $1.39 billion statewide investment in education and transportation-related initiatives. House Bill 4227 was signed into law on June 24 as Chapter 7 of the Acts of 2025 (https://malegislature.gov/Laws/SessionLaws/Acts/2025/Chapter7).

Funded primarily with above-cap Fair Share surtax revenues available from fiscal years 2023 and 2024, House Bill 4227 allocates $716 million for transportation-related initiatives and another $593.5 million for education-related programs. Under the 2022 voter-approved ballot question, the Legislature is constitutionally required to utilize Fair Share revenues only for public education and transportation purposes.

Multiple local earmarks for cities and towns were included in the supplemental budget, including $34.4 million in one-time education projects and $42.3 million in one-time transportation projects. House Bill 4227 sets aside $103 million in transportation-related funding that will directly assist cities and towns, including $80 million in supplemental local road funding, half of which is directed at small and rural communities. Another $16.4 million is included in the bill to help communities pay for the repair and replacement of municipally owned small bridges and culverts, along with $7 million to fund a pilot program to repair, maintain and improve unpaved roads.

The education funding component of the supplemental budget includes $248 million that will be made available to school districts in the form of special education circuit breaker reimbursements. Of this total, $190 million is funded through the surtax and will be used to support Fiscal Year 2026 reimbursement payments for costs incurred in Fiscal Year 2025. The remaining $58 million will be funded through the Student Opportunity Act Investment Fund.

Another $100 million is allocated in the bill for grants to build capacity for additional career technical education school opportunities across the state. Of this total, $35 million will be made available to comprehensive high schools and $15 million set aside for a pilot program for comprehensive high schools to support career and vocational technical annex buildings on their campuses.
Other initiatives funded in the supplemental budget include:

- $8.1 million for regional school transportation
- $115 million to address the higher education deferred maintenance backlog
- $45.5 million to support workforce, affordability and quality improvements in early education and care
- $10 million to establish the Boston Holocaust Museum
- $10 million for the Green Schoolworks program for K-12 school clean energy projects
- language establishing the Imagination Library to promote a comprehensive statewide initiative encouraging preschool age children to develop a love of reading and learning
- $175 million for an MBTA workforce/safety reserve
- $300 million to replenish the MBTA's Deficiency Fund
- $25 million for Regional Transit Authority facility upgrades and transit improvements
- $25 million for Regional Transit Authority workforce training grants
- $40 million to support the MBTA's physical infrastructure
- $20 million for MBTA low-income fare relief
- $13 million for water transportation infrastructure, including ferry service
- $10 million for microtransit and last-mile grants, including projects that expand mobility options for rural communities and extend services to veterans, working families, older adults, people with disabilities and low-income individuals

CHAPTER 90 ROAD AND BRIDGE FUNDING – On July 31, the House and Senate finalized a $1.185 billion transportation infrastructure bond bill that includes an expanded allocation of Chapter 90 road and bridge funding for cities and towns. House Bill 4307, *An Act financing long-term improvements to municipal roads and bridges*, was signed into law on August 8 as Chapter 17 of the Acts of 2025 (https://malegislature.gov/Laws/SessionLaws/Acts/2025/Chapter17).

While previous Chapter 90 bills have typically allocated a total of $200 million annually to cities and towns, House Bill 4307 increased that amount to $300 million for Fiscal Year 2026. Although $200 million will be allocated to municipalities using the traditional three-prong formula that is based on the weighted average of each community's local road mileage (58.33%), population (20.83%) and employment (20.83%), the remaining $100 million will be allocated based strictly on local road mileage.

The Chapter 90 program was created by the Legislature in 1973 to help cities and towns offset the costs associated with the construction, repair and maintenance of local roads and bridges. This funding, which is provided annually on a reimbursable basis, can also be used for related transportation infrastructure work such as sidewalks, traffic signalization and street lighting.

In addition to the $300 million in Chapter 90 funding, House Bill 4307 also authorizes $885 million in bond funding to support three non-Chapter 90 transportation-related initiatives, including:

- $500 million for the bridge and pavement lifecycle asset management program, which assists communities with non-federally aided roadway and bridge projects;
- $200 million for modernization and resilience upgrades to municipally owned culverts and small bridges; and

- $185 million for statewide capital projects aimed at easing congestion and improving safety through multimodal infrastructure improvements.

FY26 BUDGET REFORMS – During the House debate on the Fiscal Year 2026 state budget in April, a series of House Republican Caucus-sponsored reform initiatives were offered to assist cities and towns dealing with the implications of the MBTA Communities Act, facilitate law enforcement's compliance with US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) criminal detainer requests, delay enforcement of the advanced clean cars regulations governing the state's transition to electric vehicles, and limit eligibility for the state's emergency shelter system to citizens who have resided in the Commonwealth for at least six months, among other initiatives. Below is a list of the proposed Republican-sponsored reforms.

MUNICIPAL TAX AMNESTY – This amendment would allow cities and towns to generate additional revenues by authorizing the state's first municipal tax amnesty program since 2003, to run for two consecutive months, with the actual dates set by the local legislative body. Under this proposal, communities would be able to waive any or all penalties, fees, charges and accrued interest owed on local property taxes and excise taxes, providing an incentive for taxpayers to pay the original tax assessment amount that was due in full. The amendment was rejected on a roll call vote of 25-132.

NO COST PRISONER CALLS REFORMS – This amendment would repeal the 2023 no cost calls law, which provides unlimited phone calls for inmates at county and state correctional facilities, and would also redirect the $10 million in funding set aside for this program in the House budget to support unrestricted local aid for cities and towns. It also would establish a commission to study the fiscal challenges posed by this program and its impact on prisoner participation in state funded re-entry programs. The state's sheriffs have raised concerns about the program's rising costs, with Norfolk County Sheriff Patrick McDermott testifying before the Joint Ways and Means Committee in March of 2025 that the program had already run up $12.5 million in costs in Fiscal Year 2025 alone. A study is needed to re-evaluate the cost burden of the no cost calls program and to ensure that taxpayer dollars are used more efficiently and effectively. This amendment was rejected on a roll call vote of 26-128.

CONSTITUTIONALITY OF CHAPTER 40B – This amendment would direct the House of Representatives to request an Opinion of the Justices regarding the constitutionality of the state's Chapter 40B zoning law. Created in 1969, this law was intended to promote more affordable housing development, but critics have argued that it undermines local control by allowing developers to bypass a community's zoning regulations governing density requirements. This amendment was rejected on a vote of 26-129.

FEDERAL LAW ENFORCEMENT COOPERATION – This amendment, which was modeled after legislation originally filed by former Governor Charlie Baker, provides a mechanism for law enforcement and the courts to detain individuals for United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) who pose a direct threat to public safety. The legislation came in response to the 2017 *Commonwealth v. Lunn* decision, in which the Supreme Judicial Court determined the authority to honor these detainer requests is not expressly permitted under current statutes. The amendment would allow for the detainment of individuals for possible immigration violations for up to 12 hours upon receipt of a written request and warrant from ICE. This authorization would be limited to ICE detainer requests for individuals who pose a threat to public safety for engaging in, or being suspected of engaging in, specific crimes, including terrorism or espionage, criminal street gang activity, sexual abuse or exploitation, human trafficking, unlawful firearm possession, and drug distribution or trafficking. The amendment was rejected on a vote of 25-130.

RIGHT TO SHELTER REFORM – This amendment would place further restrictions on the state's right to shelter law by limiting participation in the Commonwealth's emergency housing assistance program to U.S. citizens who have resided in Massachusetts for at least six months. This would help restore the original intent of

the law by ensuring that Massachusetts residents in need have access to emergency shelter. The amendment was rejected on a vote of 27-129.

PRESERVING PUBLIC SAFETY GRANT FUNDING FOR CITIES AND TOWNS – This amendment would explicitly prohibit any city or town's eligibility for public safety related grant funding from being contingent upon that municipality's compliance with the MBTA Communities Act. In January of 2025, the Healey Administration changed the rules for the Firefighter Safety Equipment Grant program, denying grants to communities that are not in compliance with the zoning law. Tying this type of grant funding to compliance with the MBTA Communities Act is simply unacceptable and jeopardizes public safety. Although the Healey Administration later reversed course, placing language in statute will ensure that these protections remain in effect. The amendment was rejected on a vote of 27-128.

MBTA COMMUNITIES ACT ENFORCEMENT DELAY – This amendment would prohibit the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities and the Attorney General's Office from enforcing any regulation, directive, or requirement under the MBTA Communities Act prior to December 31, 2026. This would give communities at least a temporary reprieve from the harsh penalties being imposed on non-compliant communities, including the loss of vital state grant funding to support critical local projects. The amendment was rejected on a vote of 30-126.

ADVANCED CLEAN CARS REGULATIONS DELAY – This amendment would delay the implementation and enforcement of the Advanced Clean Cars II regulations until no earlier than July 1, 2027. These regulations govern the state's planned transition to zero emission electric vehicles and are based on California Low Emissions Vehicle Program, but Massachusetts currently lacks sufficient infrastructure to support these types of vehicles. The measure was voted down on a voice vote.

COMMISSION TO STUDY OUT-OF-STATE MIGRATION – This amendment establishes a commission to study the factors that impact the decisions of individuals and businesses to relocate to and from the Commonwealth. It calls for the commission to study factors contributing to businesses and individuals relocating to and from the commonwealth, such as tax policies; estate tax policies; corporate taxes; costs of living; business operating costs; employment opportunities; and workforce challenges. The commission will develop recommendations to promote economic competitiveness in Massachusetts and to prevent businesses and individuals from leaving the state while also encouraging businesses and individuals to relocate to the Commonwealth, with a report due by July 1, 2026. The amendment was adopted by the House as part of a consolidated amendment on a roll call vote of 154-3 but was not included in the final conference committee budget.

VOTER ID REQUIREMENTS – This amendment would require voters to present a valid form of identification, such as a driver's license or passport, when voting to ensure election integrity. It also directs the Secretary of State's office to develop a program to make a Massachusetts photo identification card available free of charge for voting purposes. The amendment was rejected on a vote of 21-134

Other notable policy initiatives contained in the FY26 state budget include provisions to:

- allow Gold Star Family spouses to remarry without losing their annuity benefit
- establish a working group to make recommendations to assist homeowners whose property foundations have been compromised by the presence of pyrite or pyrrhotite
- require the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities to study the possibility of providing a sales tax exemption for multifamily housing projects that have been impacted by the increased costs of building materials imposed by federal tariffs
- explore the feasibility and impact of providing cities and towns with a local option to exempt new affordable housing developments from certain tax levy provisions

- create the Secure Choice Program, a state-managed employee retirement savings program for private sector workers at companies with 25 or more employees who currently don't have access to such a plan through their employer

CANNABIS CONTROL COMMISSION REFORMS – On June 4, the House of Representatives unanimously approved a proposal to restructure the state's Cannabis Control Commission (CCC) and amend the state's marijuana laws to regulate hemp-based drinks and consumable cannabinoid (CBD) products, improve workplace safety oversight and data collection within the industry, and authorize stand-alone retail medical marijuana businesses. On November 19, the Senate engrossed its own CCC reform bill (Senate Bill 2722), with some key differences from the House version that will have to be worked out between the two branches before it can reach the Governor's desk.

While both versions of the bill decrease the total number of commissioners from five to three, the House version grants appointing authority for all three commissioners to the Governor's office while the Senate version grants the Governor's office appointing authority for two members, with the third to be appointed by the Attorney General. Currently, two of the five members of the CCC are appointed by a majority vote of the governor, treasurer and attorney general, with the remaining members chosen individually by each of the three constitutional officers. Although the treasurer currently appoints the chair and the executive director, both the House and Senate proposals would authorize the Governor to appoint the chair, who would be responsible for selecting the executive director. However, the Senate version of the bill requires the chair to select an executive director in consultation with the other commissioners.

The CCC has been dealing with several internal and external conflicts over the last two years, including Treasurer Deborah Goldberg's decision to suspend, and later fire, former chair Shannon O'Brien in 2023 due to allegations of racial insensitivity and bullying behavior (a judge ordered O'Brien's reinstatement in September of 2025 following a two-year legal battle). In response to the ongoing dysfunction, Inspector General Jeffrey S. Shapiro called for the Legislature to appoint a receiver for the CCC, describing it as a "rudderless agency without a clear indication of who is responsible for running its day-to-day operations."

In addition to changing the CCC's composition and appointing authority, House Bill 4206, *An Act modernizing the Commonwealth's cannabis laws* establishes a comprehensive regulatory framework for hemp-derived beverages and consumable CBD products, including licensing, compliance, testing, and taxation structures similar to alcohol and cannabis, but tailored to hemp-derived products, with the CCC being the primary regulatory body. The House bill would require the CCC to publish a list of products approved for sale, establish an 11-ounce minimum for hemp-derived beverages, and establish labeling requirements that contain testing disclosures. Additionally, the bill establishes manufacturing regulations and would impose a $4.05 per gallon excise tax on all manufactured hemp beverages and a 5.35 percent excise tax on all consumable CBD products. Furthermore, this bill provides the CCC and local boards of health with the means to investigate and enforce the regulatory provisions set forth in this measure.

In contrast to the House proposal, the Senate bill directs the CCC, in consultation with medical experts and appropriate state agencies and departments including the Department of Public Health, the Department of Agricultural Resources, the Department of Revenue and the Alcoholic Beverages Control Commission, to conduct a study and develop recommendations regarding the effective regulation of the hemp-derived cannabinoid market.

The House version of the bill increases the license cap for marijuana establishments from three to six while the Senate version increases the cap to four. Both versions include a provision exempting minority stakeholders from the licensing cap. However, the House version allows for up to a 35% stake, with the Senate version only allowing 12%.

Both the House and Senate bills remove the vertical integration requirement for medical marijuana establishments, which require medical licensees to both grow and process the products they sell. Additionally, both bills increase the personal possession of marijuana limit from 1 ounce to 2 ounces.

A six-member House and Senate conference committee was recently appointed to work out the differences between the two bills and produce a final version that can be sent to Governor Healey.

ENHANCED TEACHERS' RETIREMENT BENEFITS – On July 30, the House unanimously approved an enhanced superannuation retirement package for educators.

House Bill 4361, *An Act relative to benefits for teachers*, would allow qualifying teachers to participate in an alternative superannuation retirement program, while also protecting the retirement status of teachers who leave the profession to work at the Executive Office of Education (EOE) or the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE).

House Bill 4361 mirrors legislation that passed the House late last session but was never acted on by the Senate. It would allow qualifying teachers who were hired prior to July 1, 2001 and did not elect to join the alternative superannuation retirement plan, known as RetirementPlus, to be given a one-time opportunity to do so. Qualifying teachers would have up to 180 days from the bill's effective date to elect to participate.

The RetirementPlus program provides an enhanced retirement benefit for qualifying individuals who have completed 30 years of service, at least 20 years of which must be as a member of the Massachusetts Teacher Retirement System or the Boston Retirement System as a teacher. The proposed one-time enrollment in the RetirementPlus program is limited to individuals who:

- are a teacher or nurse who is an active or inactive member of the teachers' retirement system;
- became eligible for membership in the teachers' retirement system before July 1, 2001;
- began contributing to the teachers' retirement system before July 1, 2001; and
- did not provide a written election to participate or held a good faith belief that they elected to participate in the alternative superannuation retirement benefit program to the teachers' retirement system before July 1, 2001 nor at any other time prior to September 1, 2025.

House Bill 4361 also includes language allowing individuals currently vested in the Massachusetts Teachers Retirement System or the Boston Retirement System as a teacher and who are subsequently employed by EOE or DESE to retain their teacher status for retirement purposes and to be considered as remaining in service in that capacity. The House bill provides for these individuals to make a single lump sum payment or installment payments into the retirement system to receive creditable service.

House Bill 4361 was referred to the Senate Ways and Means Committee on August 4 and is still under review.

HUMAN TRAFFICKING AWARENESS TRAINING – On July 30, the House of Representatives unanimously approved legislation that would require certain hospitality workers to receive formal training to help them recognize suspected cases of human trafficking.

House Bill 4360 calls for licensed innholders to establish a human trafficking recognition training program, which employees of Massachusetts hotels, motels, lodging houses, and bed and breakfast establishments will be required to take. The training program, including the organizations and providers that offer the training, will be subject to the approval of the Attorney General so that all impacted employers are following uniform standards.

In addition to the training program, licensed innholders will be required to conspicuously post a written human trafficking notice developed by the Attorney General in their lobby and in any public restrooms on the premises. This notice must include the telephone number for the National Human Trafficking Hotline, which is 1-888-373-7888.

According to its website (https://humantraffickinghotline.org/en), the National Human Trafficking Hotline has identified 1,175 cases of human trafficking involving 2,283 victims in Massachusetts alone between 2007 and 2024. On a national level, the hotline has identified 112,822 cases of human trafficking involving 218,568 victims. This includes incidents involving sex trafficking, labor trafficking, and in some cases both forms of exploitation.

House Bill 4360 provides an exemption for innholders with three rooms or less. The bill would not apply to Airbnb rentals or other similar services.

The provisions included in House Bill 4360 will help to protect women and children from being exploited. Both the Massachusetts Lodging Association and the American Hotel and Lodging Association have endorsed this legislation, which is currently under review by the Senate Ways and Means Committee.

SEPTEMBER 2026 PRIMARY DATE CHANGE – In September, the House and Senate approved legislation moving the 2026 state primary election date from September 15 to September 1, a measure that was signed into law on September 23 as Chapter 34 of the Acts of 2025 (https://malegislature.gov/Laws/SessionLaws/Acts/2025/Chapter34).

Moving next year's scheduled primary date up by two weeks will provide some flexibility to help ensure that Massachusetts can meet all state and federal ballot deadlines, including a requirement that military personnel serving overseas receive an absentee ballot at least 45 days before the November 3, 2026 state election, pursuant to the federal Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act.

Under current state law, the state primary must be held seven weeks prior to the biennial state election, as long as that date does not coincide with a religious holiday. Chapter 34 would set the new 2026 state primary date at nine weeks prior to the November election.

The new law establishes a deadline of September 3 for successful write-in or sticker candidates to file an acceptance of nomination to appear on the November 2026 ballot. In addition, the bill outlines the process for filling a vacancy that occurs in the event a candidate dies, withdraws, or is ruled ineligible for the November ballot.

SUPPORT FOR FISCALLY-STRAINED HOSPITALS AND COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTERS – In an effort to support Massachusetts' health care system, the House of Representatives on September 17 engrossed a supplemental spending bill that steers $234 million in one-time state aid payments to dozens of fiscally strained acute care hospitals and community health centers across the Commonwealth.

The bill will provide $122 million to several dozen acute care hospitals, with funding eligibility for individual hospitals determined primarily based on the facility's public payer mix, relative price, and negative operating margins. House Bill 4530 also requires the secretary of the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) to submit a report to the legislature detailing the schedule of payments and how each hospital intends to utilize the funding.

Another $77 million will be transferred into the Health Safety Net Trust Fund, which reimburses acute care hospitals and community health centers for health services provided to eligible low-income, uninsured, and

underinsured residents. In Fiscal Year 2024, the Health Safety Net Trust Fund experienced a shortfall of $197 million, but a recent report issued by the Centers for Health Information and Analysis noted that the fund's deficit was projected to reach $250 million in Fiscal Year 2025 and $290 million in the current fiscal year.

Most of the remaining $35 million authorized in the bill will be allocated to community health centers that demonstrate significant financial needs, as determined by EOHHS in consultation with the Massachusetts League of Community Health Centers (MLCHC). The MLCHC will be provided with $2.5 million of this funding, which will be used to facilitate regional savings initiatives, including shared service options. Within 24 hours of the House vote, the Senate also approved the bill, and it was signed into law on September 22 as Chapter 33 of the Acts of 2025 (https://malegislature.gov/Laws/SessionLaws/Acts/2025/Chapter33).

PROTECTING TRANSIT WORKERS FROM ASSAULTS – On October 22, the House of Representatives unanimously approved legislation adding transit workers to an existing law that provides penalties for assaulting a public employee while they are engaged in the performance of their duties.

Under the existing statute governing assault and battery committed against a public employee, violators are subject to a penalty of imprisonment for not less than 90 days and not more than 2½ years in a house of correction or a fine of between $500 and $5,000. Following Senate approval in November, the two branches agreed to modify the bill to allow for violators to be subject to both imprisonment and a fine.

House Bill 4645, *An Act relative to assault and battery upon a transit worker*, also adds the crime of assault and battery by means of a bodily substance. The bill defines a bodily substance as "any human secretion, discharge or emission including, but not limited to, blood, saliva, mucous, semen, urine or feces."

According to the Federal Transit Administration, assaults on public transit employees increased by 232% nationwide between 2014 and 2024. The Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority reported over 600 assaults on its employees in 2024 alone, 33 of which included a weapon and 38 of which involved the use of a bodily fluid in the attack.

The bill was signed into law on December 3 as Chapter 79 of the Acts of 2025 (https://malegislature.gov/Laws/SessionLaws/Acts/2025/Chapter79).

CHILD WELFARE PROTECTIONS – On October 22, the House of Representatives approved legislation designed to improve communication and coordination among state agencies working with the families of children in foster care or receiving state services. House Bill 4646, *An Act enhancing child welfare protections*, takes a multi-faceted approach by streamlining the Department of Children and Families' reporting requirements, clarifying the role of the Office of the Child Advocate (OCA), and moving the Child Fatality Review Team from the Office of the Chief Medical Officer to the OCA.

One of the key changes contained in the bill is a streamlining of DCF's reporting requirements. While DCF currently reports to multiple agencies on various topics, House Bill 4646 would instead require that DCF submit an annual report by October 31 each year detailing the agency's performance during the previous fiscal year. This report would be made available to the public.

DCF's annual report will contain information on a variety of topics, including:

- **Case counts**, delineated by demographics, placement type, median placement length of stay, and rates of racial disproportionality;
- **Case processes and outcomes**, including educational well-being outcomes, fatalities, and the rates and timeliness of the delivery of medical and behavioral health services; and

- **Operational overviews**, including caseloads, staffing trends, the department's budget, and details on any new or ongoing initiatives to improve the practices, procedures and policies of the department.

In an effort to promote the educational well-being of children in DCF custody, House Bill 4646 establishes an education unit in the department, subject to appropriation, to develop and oversee policies for children in its custody. DCF will also hire an education director to run this unit.

House Bill 4646 also clarifies the role of the Office of the Child Advocate by affirming that it will remain independent of any other executive office, state agency or commission, and will be focused on overseeing the services that state agencies provide to children while also advising the public and government officials on how best to improve services to children and their families. It also authorizes the OCA to request data from the trial court for research purposes and requires critical incident reports submitted to the OCA to include demographic information on the child who is the subject of the report.

During floor debate, the House adopted amendments to:

- Establish a special commission to study the development of a digital education portfolio system to support the stability and well-being of foster children and youth in the Commonwealth, with a report and recommendations due by November 30, 2026; and
- Add members to the Child Fatality Review Team, including the DCF chapter president or designee of the certified collective bargaining representative of bargaining unit 8, along with any other person, selected by the co-chairs or by majority vote of the members of the state team, with expertise or information relevant to an individual case.

House Bill 4646 was referred to the Senate Ways and Means Committee on October 27, where it remains under review.

ENHANCED OVERSIGHT OF HOME CARE AGENCIES – On November 5, the House of Representatives took action to enhance state oversight of home care agencies operating in Massachusetts by passing legislation that would implement a formal licensing process to help protect clients receiving services.

House Bill 4706, *An Act to improve Massachusetts home care*, calls for the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) to establish and administer a formal licensing process for home care agencies. These entities are not currently licensed in Massachusetts, making it difficult to ensure they are providing quality services to their clients and potentially leaving clients in a vulnerable position.

Under the House proposal, EOHHS will be required to issue temporary licenses within 180 days of the effective date of the bill, and to develop rules and regulations for the licensing and conduct of home care agencies within one year. The new home care licenses will be valid for three years and subject to renewal, but EOHHS will have the power to revoke or suspend a license and to issue fines of up to $500 per day if an agency does not comply with the new regulations governing the conduct of home care agencies.

House Bill 4706 contains many important protections for individuals and families who rely on home care services by requiring background checks for home care workers and establishing a Home Care Worker and Consumer Abuse Stakeholder Advisory Committee. The committee will advise EOHHS on how to address abusive treatment of home care workers, personal care attendants, and home care consumers, and will be responsible for submitting periodic reports detailing its findings and recommendations.

Under the provisions of the House bill, EOHHS will also be tasked with:

- creating training requirements for agency staff on infection control, handling emergencies, and reporting suspected abuse;
- establishing policies to ensure safe working conditions;
- setting minimum standards for service plans and contracts executed by home care agencies;
- establishing minimum coverage requirements for workers' compensation and liability insurance; and
- mandating annual and ongoing reporting requirements for licensed home care agencies

The House bill also creates a Home Care Oversight Advisory Council to advise EOHHS on the implementation of the new licensure requirements and regulations governing the conduct of home care agencies. The advisory council will be comprised of representatives from various state agencies, as well as the Home Care Aide Council, Home Care Alliance of Massachusetts, Massachusetts Aging Access, and 1199 SEIU.

An amendment adopted unanimously during floor debate would create a special legislative commission to study family caregiving policy, in consultation with the Health Policy Commission, and to file a report with its findings and recommendations by December 1, 2026. As part of the study, the commission will conduct an evaluation of all state-funded efforts in caregiving research, clinical care, institutional and home-based and community-based services and supports, and will investigate the potential fiscal, access and quality impacts of allowing spouses to serve as paid caregivers in the MassHealth program.

House Bill 4706, as amended, was referred to the Senate Ways and Means Committee on November 6, where it remains under review.

REMOVING OFFENSIVE AND DEROGATORY LANGUAGE FROM STATE LAWS – On November 5, the House of Representatives unanimously approved legislation to update Massachusetts' General Laws by removing outdated and offensive language used to describe individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The Senate previously engrossed its own version of the bill – Senate Bill 2563 – on July 24.

House Bill 4704, *An Act amending certain laws relative to individuals with disabilities*, revises language in multiple sections of the Massachusetts General Laws used to refer to people with disabilities. It strikes phrases such as "handicapped persons," "disabled individuals," "disabled American veterans," and "mentally retarded" and replaces this terminology with phrases such as "persons with disabilities," "person with an intellectual or developmental disability," and related wording.

The Arc of Massachusetts, which has been advocating for these changes, lists the bill among its legislative priorities, noting that "these derogatory words alienate people with disabilities and are used to insult and discriminate."

The House and Senate will now work to reconcile the differences between their two proposals to produce a final bill that can be sent to Governor Healey for her review and signature.

HIGHER EDUCATION BRIGHT ACT – On November 18, the House of Representatives approved legislation providing $3.28 billion to help address deferred infrastructure maintenance and other modernization projects at Massachusetts's 29 public college and university campuses. House Bill 4750, *An Act to build resilient infrastructure to generate higher-ed transformation* (also known as the BRIGHT Act), uses a combination of bonding and surtax revenues to support the state's institutes of higher education.

The stated goal of the BRIGHT Act, which was originally filed by Governor Healey on January 21, is to "provide for a program of capital improvements to public higher education institutions to provide support for these institutions in carrying out their educational missions and to enhance regional economic development

through their educational initiatives." The legislation is expected to help support the creation of approximately 20,000 construction-related jobs.

The bill includes:

- $1.25 billion for deferred maintenance, modernization, decarbonization and major capital projects at state and community college campuses;
- $1.25 billion for deferred maintenance, modernization, decarbonization and major capital projects at the University of Massachusetts' campuses;
- $100 million for renovating campus facilities and property for housing and mixed-use development;
- $80 million for decarbonization and energy efficiency projects and plans for public higher education institutions;
- $120 million for lab modernization, community college and voc-tech facility repairs and modernization, and repair and modernization of facilities to support student mental health;
- $30 million for developing campus master plans for public higher education institutions;
- $275 million for the revitalization of the Huntington Tower Building at the Massachusetts College of Art and Design;
- $50 million for a campus improvement grant program; and
- $20 million to facilitate and enhance remote and hybrid learning opportunities for students.

House Bill 4750 also establishes a competitive grant program that will provide $100 million in funding for career technical education and training programs that align with regional economic and workforce development priorities. These grants can be used for the purchase and installation of equipment and to facilitate collaboration that connects high school and vocational technical program students with post-secondary opportunities.

House Bill 4750 also requires the commissioner of the Division of Capital Asset Management and Maintenance (DCAMM) to work with the presidents of the state's public higher education institutions and the secretary of the Executive Office of Administration & Finance to identify deferred maintenance projects at any state college or university that exceeds $50 million, and to provide details on what is being done to address this deferred maintenance. This report will be due within 90 days of the effective date of the BRIGHT Act.

Moving forward, House Bill 4750 calls for the DCAMM commissioner to file an annual report on capital expenditures for public higher education. In addition to identifying best practices, this report will also include details on projected capital needs and funding gaps that will need to be addressed. The commissioner will work in consultation with the presidents of the state's public higher education institutions, the UMass Building Authority, and the Massachusetts State College Building Authority to produce these annual reports.

House Bill 4750 also authorizes the Commissioner of Higher Education to dispose of and sell real property at a public higher education institution that is deemed to be no longer needed. Proceeds from the property sale will be deposited into a new Higher Education Property Disposition Fund, which can then be used to pay for future campus capital facility project.

The BRIGHT Act is currently under review by the Senate Committee on Ways and Means, after being referred there on November 19.

RESTORATION OF SHELTER SPENDING REPORTING REQUIREMENTS AND OTHER PROPOSED REFORMS – On November 15, while debating a supplemental budget to address deficiencies in multiple state spending accounts and officially close the books on Fiscal Year 2025, the House Republican Caucus put forward a series of reform proposals designed to promote greater fiscal accountability in state spending.

The Caucus successfully advocated for restoring a requirement that the Healey Administration provide ongoing updates on the amount of state spending associated with running the Commonwealth's emergency shelter system, which has reached an unsustainable level of approximately $1 billion a year due to the migrant shelter crisis. Under the GOP proposal, which was retained in the final supplemental closeout budget, the Administration must continue providing details on how much the state is spending on the shelter program as part of the bi-weekly reports issued by the Executive Office for Administration and Finance and the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities (EOHLC). The FY25 closeout supplemental budget was signed into law on November 25 as Chapter 73 of the Acts of 2025 (https://malegislature.gov/Laws/SessionLaws/Acts/2025/Chapter73).

The Legislature first implemented the shelter spending reporting requirement in 2023 amidst the growing migrant crisis, calling for the public disclosure of "any projected deficiency in funds related to said crisis in Fiscal Year 2024 and projected costs related to said crisis through the end of Fiscal Year 2025". When the reporting requirement expired on June 30, the Healey Administration stopped reporting these figures.

The House GOP amendment makes the reporting requirement permanent, while also directing the Administration to provide retroactive spending figures dating back to July 1. Reinstating the reporting requirement will help to ensure more transparency in the state's shelter program and will give the state's taxpayers a better understanding of how much it is costing the state to run.

During floor debate on the Fiscal Year 25 closeout supplemental budget, a related amendment was offered by Representative Kenneth P. Sweezey (R-Duxbury) pertaining to the HomeBASE program, which is being used to help transition people out of the shelter system and into permanent housing. This amendment, which was rejected on a voice vote, would have required EOHLC to verify the United States citizenship status of each applicant prior to their being awarded any HomeBASE benefit, and would have prohibited any funds from being provided to an applicant who fails to provide satisfactory evidence of United States citizenship.

Several additional GOP-sponsored reform measures – including amendments seeking to implement stronger taxpayer protections governing the use of government-issued procurement cards, reforms to the program that provides unlimited free phone calls to incarcerated individuals, and enhanced oversight of state healthcare spending – were rejected by the House. The following is a brief description of these proposals:

REGULATING PROCUREMENT CARDS – House GOP Leadership offered an amendment to address the misuse of state-issued procurement cards (or "P-cards"), which are funded through taxpayer dollars and are only supposed to be used in limited circumstances as a payment method of last resort. Although there are guidelines for the proper use of P-cards, the Boston Herald recently published a series of articles that exposed how these guidelines are largely being ignored throughout the executive branch, with tens of thousands of dollars being spent on food, high-end hotels, and travel.

To prevent these continued abuses and provide a measure of accountability to the public, this amendment called for placing the current guidelines in statute and directing the Comptroller to issue regulations by which state agencies must abide. It would have explicitly prohibited procurement cards from being used for expenses such as meals, snacks, or coffee; cash advances; gift cards; legal services; medical services; alcohol purchases; and the personal expenses of the cardholder, while also imposing a limit of $1,000 on individual transactions and $5,000 on monthly transactions.

INMATE PHONE CALLS REFORMS – The House Republican Caucus also offered a series of amendments to reform the 2023 law making unlimited free phone calls available to prisoners, which is costing the state sheriffs' offices millions of dollars a year. Among the three proposals filed was a House GOP Leadership amendment that would have repealed the 2023 law while creating a commission to study the program and its impact on inmate participation in state funded re-entry programs. A second amendment called for an expansion

of an Inspector General audit of the state sheriffs' offices included in the underlying bill to include a review of the utilization and increased costs associated with the program and any recommendations for changes. The third amendment, offered by Representative Sweezey, would have kept the program intact but would have provided flexibility to sheriffs to limit the duration or frequency of no-cost telephone calls to control expenses and to support inmate rehabilitation and participation in educational, vocational, or behavioral programming.

HEALTHCARE SPENDING OVERSIGHT – An amendment filed by Representative Michael Soter (R-Bellingham) would have required the Secretary of Health and Human Services to submit a healthcare spending report to the Legislature, including an analysis of the factors contributing to the need for supplemental appropriations for the Commonwealth's healthcare system, a breakdown of all cost drivers related to supplemental appropriations, and an accounting of all Medicare, Medicaid, and other healthcare costs that can be attributable to citizens vs. noncitizens of the Commonwealth. The amendment called for this review to include an overview of the Healey Administration's strategies to mitigate these costs, with a report due by the time the governor files her Fiscal Year 2027 budget in January.

INSPECTOR GENERAL NO COST CALLS REVIEW – Despite failing to secure much-needed reforms to the no cost calls program in the Fiscal Year 2025 closeout supplemental budget (see above), the House Republican Caucus is pushing ahead with a renewed effort to implement long-overdue changes to the program.

On November 25, members of the House Republican Caucus wrote to Inspector General Jeffrey Shapiro urging him to conduct a "comprehensive review" of the 2023 state law that provides inmates in Massachusetts with unlimited free access to voice communication services, saying reforms are needed to address rising costs associated with the taxpayer-funded program. The letter was initiated by House Minority Leader Bradley H. Jones, Jr. (R-North Reading) and State Representative Kenneth P. Sweezey (R-Duxbury).

The Fiscal Year 2025 closeout supplemental budget, which was signed into law on November 25 (https://malegislature.gov/Laws/SessionLaws/Acts/2025/Chapter73), includes language directing the Inspector General to investigate expenditures and compensation levels within the state's sheriffs' offices, following reports that they are facing a collective deficit of $162 million, some of which is attributable to the costs associated with the no cost calls program. In their letter, members of the House GOP are asking Shapiro to incorporate a review of the no cost calls program into his investigation.

"Over the last two years, participation in this program has increased dramatically, but so too have the associated financial costs and operational challenges impacting our state and county correctional facilities and state prisons," the legislators wrote, noting that the 2023 law requires the Department of Correction (DOC) and all state sheriffs' offices to provide inmates with access to unlimited free phone calls and computer tablets, with the state's taxpayers picking up the costs.

"None of us dispute some of the benefits of incarcerated individuals being able to remain in contact with their loved ones while in prison, but the negative consequences of allowing unlimited communication are undeniable," the letter states. "In addition to the growing fiscal challenges of maintaining this program, we are also concerned about how the no cost calls law has led to a dramatic reduction in inmate participation in state-funded re-entry programs. A commonsense alternative to this program is needed that considers the value of family connection without overlooking the administrative and fiscal realities correctional facilities are facing by offering this program."

The Caucus letter cites the need to implement "significant reforms" to the no cost calls law, including imposing limits on the duration and frequency of the calls to rein in costs and allow DOC and the sheriffs' offices to "continue to focus on the rehabilitation of inmates by encouraging their participation in educational, vocational, and behavioral programming."

"This programming, which is also supported by taxpayer dollars, is critical to preparing inmates for reintegration into society upon their release from prison and minimizing their risk of reoffending in the future," the Caucus wrote.

The Inspector General is required to submit a preliminary report on the sheriffs' offices by February 27, 2026 and a final report by May 31, 2026. The caucus letter calls on him to include in his final report "recommendations for transitioning to a more fiscally constrained and sustainable alternative to the no cost calls initiative."

HEALTH CARE WORKPLACE VIOLENCE PREVENTION – On November 19, the House of Representatives took steps to address workplace violence within the health care industry and protect employees who suffer bodily injuries on the job, unanimously passing House Bill 4767, *An Act requiring health care employers to develop and implement programs to prevent workplace violence*.

According to a 2023 report issued by the Massachusetts Health and Hospital Association, "every 38 minutes in Massachusetts health care facilities someone, most often a clinician or an employee, is physically assaulted, endures verbal abuse, or is threatened." House Bill 4767 attempts to address this problem by implementing stronger protections for health care workers, including mandatory training and enhanced reporting requirements.

Under the House proposal, health care employers will now be required to annually perform a facility-specific risk assessment. This assessment will be done in cooperation with the facility's employees and any labor organization that represents these workers.

The House bill also directs employers to develop plans to minimize workplace violence dangers, including establishing employee training and reporting procedures. It also takes steps to protect employees who report incidents of workplace violence, including clarifying that they may receive paid leave following an incident of workplace violence, which will not be counted towards their accrued vacation and sick time, although employers can require documentation related to the incident if the workplace violence leave exceeds 5 days.

Under House Bill 4767, health care employers will be responsible for submitting annual reports on all workplace violence incidents to the Commissioner of Public Health. Employers must also report to the district attorney who has jurisdiction over the community where the facility is located.

House Bill 4767 also directs the Executive Office of Health and Human Services, in coordination with the Executive Office of Public Safety and Security, to submit a report to the Joint Committee on Health Care Financing, the president of the Massachusetts Health and Hospital Association, Inc., the president of the Massachusetts Nurses Association and the president of 1199 SEIU with recommendations to improve interagency data sharing communication and collaboration between health care facilities within one year of the bill's effective date. This report will also include recommendations for how public safety and law enforcement entities can best address alternative appropriate placement for criminal justice involved patients with a mental health or behavioral health diagnosis.

House Bill 4767 is currently before the Senate Ways and Means Committee.