



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
House of Representatives
State House, Boston 02133-1054

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Representative Smola supports \$55M supplemental budget to fund COVID-19 testing and school masks

BOSTON – Representative Todd M. Smola (R-Warren, Ranking Member, Committee on Ways & Means) recently supported a \$55 million supplemental budget that provides funding for expanded COVID-19 testing and the distribution of masks for public school districts, while also setting a date for the 2022 state primary election.

House Bill 4340, *An Act relative to immediate COVID recovery needs*, was engrossed on a vote of 159-0 in the House of Representatives on January 19. The Senate is expected to take up the bill the week of January 23.

Representative Smola said the spending proposal earmarks \$25 million to help establish and expand COVID-19 testing sites across Massachusetts and to purchase tests. Funding will be made available for on-site testing locations such as community health centers, urgent care centers and non-profit organizations, which will be required to provide walk-up appointments.

An additional \$25 million will be used to acquire N95 and KN95 masks for distribution to students, staff and faculty at elementary and secondary public schools no later than February 28. The remaining \$5 million is being set aside to help increase vaccination rates for children between the ages of 5 and 11 living in communities that have been disproportionately impacted by the coronavirus.

The supplemental budget also establishes the 2022 state primary date for Tuesday, September 6. This authorization is needed to ensure that Massachusetts is in compliance with the federal Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act, which requires absentee ballots to be mailed to qualifying military and overseas voters who apply for a ballot at least 45 days before the November 8 state election.

House Bill 4340 also temporarily extends certain pandemic emergency provisions that had expired in December. According to Representative Smola, municipalities will be allowed to continue holding remote public meetings until July 15, 2022 to help mitigate the transmission of the coronavirus, and remote notarization using electronic video conferencing will continue to be authorized through the same date.

House Bill 4340 contains an additional provision allowing certain retired state, county and municipal employees to continue working during the pandemic as a consultant or an independent contractor without impacting their pension. For additional information please contact Representative Smola at Todd.Smola@mahouse.gov or (617)722-2100.

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