



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
April 30, 2021

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Representative Smola supports passage of \$47.7 billion House budget for Fiscal Year 2022

BOSTON – Representative Todd M. Smola (R-Warren, Ranking Member, Committee on Ways & Means) recently supported a House-proposed \$47.7 billion state budget for Fiscal Year 2022 (FY22) that increases local aid, funds the first-year implementation of the Student Opportunity Act, and continues to devote funding for a variety of COVID-19 relief and recovery initiatives.

While the pandemic delayed the passage and signing of the Fiscal Year 2021 budget until December of 2020, the budget process is back to a more traditional timetable this year. The House budget proposal was engrossed on a vote of 160-0 in the early morning hours of April 29 after three days of debate on over 1,100 amendments.

The House budget provides \$5.5 billion in Chapter 70 education aid to cities and towns, which represents a \$219.6 million increase over current funding levels, and nearly \$1.2 billion in Unrestricted General Government Aid (UGGA) to fund essential municipal services. Representative Smola noted that under the House spending proposal, Brimfield will receive \$1,373,076 in direct education aid and \$428,494 in unrestricted state aid for the new fiscal year that begins July 1; Holland will receive \$938,238 in education aid and \$221,829 in unrestricted state aid; Palmer will receive \$10,955,180 in education aid and \$2,204,122 in unrestricted state aid; Sturbridge will receive \$3,870,754 in education aid and \$851,490 in unrestricted state aid; Wales will receive \$1,004,630 in education aid and \$259,594 in unrestricted state aid; Ware will receive \$11,202,810 in education aid and \$1,897,463 in unrestricted state aid; and Warren will receive \$994,363 in unrestricted state aid.

The House budget also offers additional education support for municipalities by funding the Special Education Circuit Breaker at \$367.6 million; charter school aid at \$154.6 million; regional school transportation at \$82.2 million; and homeless student transportation at \$14.5 million. To help address some of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, the House budget provides an additional \$40 million to help schools maintain funding despite enrollment loss, as well as \$15 million to support summer education, mental health and socialization services for students.

Representative Smola noted that the budget funds the first year of the Student Opportunity Act (SOA), which was initially scheduled to be implemented beginning in the current fiscal year but was postponed one year due to the pandemic. Despite the delay, the House budget envisions fully implementing the SOA within six years, rather than seven, so the original timetable can be met.

The House budget does not incorporate any forthcoming federal aid anticipated under the American Rescue Plan (ARP) Act, but instead proposes a withdrawal of \$1.875 billion from the state's Rainy Day Fund. It also calls for a one-year delay of the charitable tax deduction, which would save approximately \$64 million in FY22.

To help address food insecurity issues exacerbated by the pandemic, the House budget boosts emergency food assistance funding to \$30 million and the Healthy Incentives Program to \$13 million. Other funding highlights from the budget include:

- a \$20 million rate increase for the state's childcare providers;
- \$15 million for Head Start Grants;
- \$12 million for child care resource and referral agencies;
- \$2.5 million for early childhood mental health grants;
- \$130 million in higher education scholarship funding;
- \$5 million for local tourism recovery marketing;
- \$5 million for small business technical assistance;
- \$148 million for the Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program;
- \$84 million for public housing subsidies;
- \$22 million for Residential Assistance to Families in Transition (RAFT);
- \$2.29 billion for developmental services, including day and work programs and respite family supports; and
- \$160 million for the Bureau of Substance Abuse Addiction Services;

Among the new policy initiatives included in the House budget is a proposal to make the Massachusetts Educational Financing Authority (MEFA) college savings tax deduction permanent, allowing individuals to deduct up to \$1,000 and married couples to deduct up to \$2,000 for prepaid tuition or college savings program. The budget also creates a commission to develop recommendations and best practices for local and regional public safety responses to mental health emergencies.

The budget now moves to the Senate, which is expected to begin debating its own spending proposal the week of May 24. For additional information please contact Representative Smola at Todd.Smola@mahouse.gov or (617)722-2100.

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