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For Immediate Release

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Rep. Kane calls for increased transparency in conducting House sessions, committee hearings, and polls

BOSTON – State Representative Hannah Kane (R-Shrewsbury) recently opposed a new House rules package, saying it does not go far enough to ensure increased transparency in the way the House of Representatives and its legislative committees operate.

House Bill 3930, an Order establishing permanent House rules for the 2021-2022 legislative session, was approved on a vote of 129-29 on July 7. The Order provides for the continued livestreaming of both informal and formal House sessions, and authorizes House committee chairs to hold hearings allowing for both in-person and virtual testimony from the public on pending legislation, but does not include a series of additional reforms supported by Representative Kane.

The House has been operating under temporary emergency rules since last year, due to health and safety concerns associated with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. The emergency rules, which were set to expire on July 15, have allowed members to participate in formal sessions and cast roll call votes remotely, in order to limit the number of members physically present in the House Chamber.

Representative Kane said the newly-adopted House rules incorporate the provisions of the emergency rules so they can be implemented in the event of a future state of emergency. However, the new rules also limit the use of emergency rules to no more than 30 days at a time, with a majority vote of the membership required to reauthorize the emergency rules for an additional 30 days.

In a separate vote, the House approved extending the temporary emergency rules until October 1, giving members the option to continue voting remotely until that time. Representative Kane opposed the extension, which passed on a vote of 130-30, saying it is unfair for legislators to continue operating under a different set of rules now that the rest of the state has already re-opened.

The permanent House rules retain the requirement that copies of all bills to be made available to members and the public at least 24 hours in advance of House debate. An attempt to expand this requirement to a minimum of 48 hours, which was backed by Representative Kane, failed on a vote of 39-119.

During floor debate, Representative Kane supported an amendment filed by the House Republican leadership team requiring that all committee polls be open for a minimum of two hours. She said this

would give legislators time to properly review the bills being polled and to make a more informed decision when casting their votes. The amendment failed on a vote of 35-124.

Representative Kane also supported two similar transparency amendments, one filed by Republicans and one filed by Democrats, to require House committees to post on the Legislature's website within 48 hours all votes taken at an executive session or on a poll detailing how each individual member voted. Both amendments failed on separate votes of 38-121 and 41-117.

Additional amendments supported by Representative Kane included proposals:

- Allowing any member serving on active reserve military duty to participate remotely in a formal session, subject to the requirements and limitations of federal law and regulation (this amendment passed on a vote of 160-0);
- Limiting the Speaker of the House's term of office to no more than eight consecutive years (this amendment failed on a vote of 35-125);
- Requiring committee chairs who schedule an emergency committee meeting that conflicts with a formal House session to provide the House Clerk with a written explanation detailing the emergency and requiring the Clerk to provide this explanation to the members (this amendment failed on a vote of 30-129);
- Requiring the House Clerk to post a calendar for all sessions, including informal sessions, on the Legislature's website and to e-mail notifications to members and staff at least half an hour prior to the start of session, in addition to requiring the Clerk to provide members and staff with a list of all miscellaneous papers to be taken up at least 15 minutes prior to the start of session (this amendment failed on a vote of 33-126); and
- Requiring members to have at least an hour to review any consolidated amendments prior to the amendment being taken up for a vote by the House (this amendment failed on a vote of 32-127).

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