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Rep. Kane opposes additional migrant shelter funding in supplemental budget

Cites financial strain being placed on cities, towns and school districts

BOSTON – State Representative Hannah Kane (R-Shrewsbury) recently opposed a supplemental spending bill that would allocate \$250 million in additional funding to the state’s emergency shelter system to help pay for the recent influx of migrants seeking shelter in Massachusetts.

Citing the severe financial strain being placed on municipal resources and the lack of a long-term plan to address the growing migrant crisis, Representative Kane voted against the supplemental spending proposal. Despite her strong opposition, House Bill 4167 was engrossed by the House on a vote of 133-25 on November 8.

Thousands of migrant individuals and families have been arriving in Massachusetts in recent months, pushing the state’s emergency shelter assistance program to its limits. With cities, towns and school districts facing increased costs to house and educate these migrants, Representative Kane said the state needs to take steps to protect communities from financial ruin.

Representative Kane criticized the state’s response to the migrant crisis, noting that although Governor Maura Healey has announced plans to cap the number of migrant families entering the emergency shelter system at 7,500, there is no plan in place to stem the flow of new arrivals. Without such a plan, cities and towns will continue to struggle financially to meet the demand for services.

Representative Kane also placed blame squarely on Congress for contributing to the crisis by failing to pass meaningful immigration reform measures.

Under Governor Healey’s shelter cap plan, which has already survived a court challenge, additional migrants who arrive in Massachusetts will be placed on a wait list. House Bill 4167 calls for the creation of one or more overflow emergency shelter sites to accommodate families who have been waitlisted, which means the number of migrants in need of services will continue to grow, effectively negating the cap. Representative Kane noted the supplemental budget also stipulates that if the overflow site or sites are not operational within 30 days – a time frame that appears unrealistic – then the cap will be rescinded until such time as they are operational.

During floor debate on the bill, Representative Kane supported an amendment filed by Representative Paul Frost (R-Auburn) to prospectively limit future emergency housing services to individuals who have been residents of the Commonwealth for at least one year and can provide documented proof of residency. She said this is a reasonable policy change that will help ensure that long-term residents do not lose out on housing assistance to individuals who are newly-arrived from out of state. The Frost amendment provides an exemption for victims of domestic violence and persons whose living situation has been affected by a fire or other natural disaster that occurred in Massachusetts. The amendment failed on a vote of 28-128.

House Bill 4167 now moves to the Senate for its consideration.

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