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Representative Kane opposes plan to spend an additional \$245 million on migrant shelter crisis

Supports efforts to ensure emergency housing services are available to longtime Massachusetts residents, including veterans

BOSTON – State Representative Hannah Kane (R-Shrewsbury) recently opposed a supplemental budget proposal that would commit an additional \$245 million in state funding to cover the ongoing costs of providing emergency housing to migrants, saying the bill does nothing but throw more taxpayer money at the problem without addressing the underlying causes driving up the program’s costs.

In voting against House Bill 4460, Representative Kane also expressed concerns that many longtime Massachusetts residents who are citizens and in need of services, including veterans, could be frozen out of receiving housing assistance as more individuals and families continue to arrive from out of state. Although she supported several Republican-sponsored amendments to reform the state’s Right to Shelter law to ensure that long-term residents are given priority when accessing these services, those amendments were ultimately unsuccessful.

In the end, House Bill 4460 was engrossed by the House of Representatives on March 6 on a vote of 121-33. The bill will now move to the Senate for its consideration.

According to Representative Kane, the House bill will bring total spending on the emergency housing assistance program to over \$820 million in Fiscal Year 2024 alone. This includes more than \$325 million allocated in the Fiscal Year 2024 budget, and an additional \$250 million inserted in a supplemental budget that was signed into law in December.

Although House Democratic leadership recently indicated that it was looking at reforms to the state’s shelter system in light of the migrant crisis, Representative Kane said those “reforms” are limited to imposing a time limit on how long people can stay within the shelter system but do nothing to stem the steady influx of migrants seeking services. Under the bill, most people can remain in a shelter for nine consecutive months, but others, including individuals who are enrolled in a job training program, can stay for up to one year.

Representative Kane noted that the shelter system continues to be overwhelmed by the large number of migrants arriving from out of state, with no end in sight despite Governor Maura Healey imposing a 7,500-family cap in October of 2023, which has led to a growing number of people being waitlisted for services.

As he did during the last supplemental budget debate, Representative Paul Frost (R-Auburn) offered an amendment to prospectively restrict future access to emergency housing services. While last year’s amendment would have limited services to individuals who have been residents of the Commonwealth for at least one year and can provide documented proof of residency, the latest amendment shortens the residency requirement to six months. It also includes a carveout exempting victims of domestic violence and persons impacted by a fire or

other natural disaster that occurred in Massachusetts. The amendment was defeated on a vote of 29-125, with Representative Kane voting to support the measure.

Representative Kane also supported a Republican Leadership-sponsored amendment allowing low-income Massachusetts residents to qualify for the work training program offered in the supplemental budget, which provides for a \$2,500 tax credit per qualified trainee but currently only applies to those who are receiving benefits through the emergency housing assistance program. This amendment was defeated on a vote of 25-129.

Another Republican Leadership-sponsored amendment backed by Representative Kane would require any funds expended for providing food through the emergency housing assistance program to be subject to a competitive bidding process. The current program's costs are \$64 per day per individual. The amendment was successful, passing on a unanimous vote of 154-0.

Representative Kane also voted against an amendment offered by Representative Frank Moran (D-Lawrence) requiring a 90-day notice prior to the termination of benefits and prohibiting the termination of more than 150 families per week from the emergency housing assistance program. The amendment prevailed on a vote of 129-25.

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