



Office of

Representative Hannah E. Kane Commonwealth of Massachusetts

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
August 3, 2023

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Representative Kane supports \$56.2 billion state budget for Fiscal Year 2024

BOSTON – State Representative Hannah Kane (R-Shrewsbury) recently supported a \$56.2 billion state budget for Fiscal Year 2024 which calls for increased local aid and free universal school meals, while also providing funding for a wide range of education and transportation-related initiatives.

The final budget, filed on July 30 as House Bill 4040, represents a compromise spending plan for the Commonwealth that was negotiated over the last two months by a six-member Conference Committee tasked with reconciling the differences between the House budget that was passed in April and the Senate version that was passed in May. The Conference Committee report was adopted by both legislative branches on July 31 and is now on Governor Maura Healey’s desk for her review and signature.

Representative Kane said the budget supports local communities by funding Chapter 70 education aid at \$6.59 billion, which represents an increase of \$604 million over Fiscal Year 2023 levels, while doubling minimum per pupil aid from \$30 to \$60. It also provides for \$1.27 billion in Unrestricted General Government Aid (UGGA) to support a wide range of municipal services, which is \$39.4 million more than last fiscal year’s appropriation. Representative Kane noted the new budget will provide Shrewsbury with \$20,971,468 in direct education aid and \$3,330,159 in unrestricted state aid, and Westborough with \$11,912,580 in direct education and \$1,385,339 in unrestricted aid, for Fiscal Year 2024.

Other education-related funding support allocated for cities and towns in the budget includes \$232.7 million in charter school reimbursements, along with \$97 million in regional school transportation and \$28.7 million for homeless student transportation. The budget also provides for \$504.6 million in Special Education Circuit Breaker reimbursements, as well as \$15 million in Rural School Assistance Grants.

Representative Kane said cities and towns will also benefit from an increase in the amount of grants the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) can provide to municipalities to assist with school building construction and renovation projects. For Fiscal Year 2024, the cap will increase from \$800 million to \$1.2 billion. Another \$100 million has been set aside in supplemental grants for school construction projects previously approved by the MSBA to help offset rising construction costs.

During the initial House budget debate in April, Representative Kane successfully advocated for the inclusion of several local initiatives for her district, including \$75,000 for Shrewsbury Youth and Family Services Funding to provide mental health services, \$45,000 for the Westborough Cedar Swamp Restoration, \$30,000 for furniture for the Shrewsbury Public Library Children’s Room, \$15,000 for Automated External Defibrillators for Shrewsbury’s recreation programs and athletic fields. In addition, she supported inclusion several earmarks added in the Senate budget debate, including \$35,000 for accessibility improvements at Dean Park in Shrewsbury, and \$45,000 for security camera installation at the Westborough town hall and senior center. All of the earmarks were retained in the final conference committee report and will be authorized for funding as soon as Governor Healey signs the budget.

According to Representative Kane, the new budget provides \$171.5 million for universal free school meals, including \$69 million to reimburse school districts and participating schools for offering these meals. More than 80,000 students a day have eaten lunch in schools since the universal school meals program started, saving households up to \$1,200 per child per year. An additional provision inserted in the budget calls for the establishment of a special commission to study nutrition guidelines and standards for school meals and to develop recommendations for improving its nutritional content.

One controversial policy change included in the Conference Committee report would allow undocumented students to qualify for in-state tuition rates and state-funded financial assistance at the state's public colleges and universities, provided they have attended schools in Massachusetts for at least three years. Representative Kane joined with her Republican colleagues in an attempt to suspend the rules and force a debate and vote on the in-state tuition language. This effort failed on a recorded roll call vote of 25-132 that was split along party lines.

The Fiscal Year 2024 budget also creates a new Education and Transportation Fund, which will be used to distribute \$1 billion in projected surtax revenues from the newly implemented Millionaires Tax to fund a variety of education and transportation initiatives. However, Representative Kane expressed strong concerns about a provision included in the budget that would exclude income surtax revenues collected and deposited into the new fund from being subject to the allowable state tax revenue limitations established by Chapter 62F, a 1986 voter-approved initiative that requires excess tax revenues be returned to the state's taxpayers whenever revenue collections in a fiscal year exceed an annual cap tied to wage and salary growth.

Representative Kane supported an unsuccessful Republican-sponsored amendment during the April House budget debate to strike this language from the budget, arguing that the proposed exclusion is not justified, as all other taxes including taxes constitutionally designated towards specific uses like the gas tax are included in the current calculation, and tax rate increases have not been held aside from the formula previously. She argued the Legislature should not be making these changes unilaterally, as they only serve to undermine the will of the voters, and urged Governor Healey to veto this measure.

Several education-related initiatives are scheduled to be funded with the surtax money, including:

- \$25 million to reduce the waitlist for income-eligible early education and care programs;
- \$15 million for capital improvements to build capacity for additional early education and care slots;
- \$25 million to support a reimbursement rate increase for center-based subsidized early education and care for salaries, benefits and stipends for professional development of early educators, which will be supplemented with an additional \$10 million in non-surtax budget revenues;
- \$5.5 million to expand pre-kindergarten and preschool opportunities;
- \$69 million for reimbursements under the universal school meals program;
- \$5 million for the expansion of early college, workforce, technical and innovation pathway programs;
- \$84 million for public higher education scholarships;
- \$25 million in scholarships for public higher education students pursuing a degree in a "high-demand" profession;
- \$20 million in financial aid scholarships for community college students 25 and older under the MassReconnect program;
- \$12 million for staffing and system upgrades needed to implement a free community college system beginning in the fall of 2024;
- \$18 million in scholarships for nursing students attending community colleges;
- \$50 million in competitive Green School Works grants to support public school district projects for installing or maintaining clean energy infrastructure;
- \$50 million for a deferred maintenance capital program for higher education institutions; and

- \$10 million to encourage private fundraising by the Commonwealth's public institutions of higher education for their endowments and capital outlay programs.

Transportation-related programs that will be funded through the new surtax include:

- \$180.8 million for physical infrastructure improvements at the MBTA, including \$20 million for commuter rail infrastructure improvements, \$50 million for bridge repairs and replacement, \$70 million for station and accessibility improvements, \$30 million for subway track and signal improvements, and \$10.8 million for the design of the Red-Blue connector project;
- \$5 million to explore the feasibility of offering a means-tested fare program at the MBTA;
- \$20 million to address ongoing safety concerns at the MBTA;
- \$100 million for municipal road and bridge construction;
- \$90 million for transit improvements at regional transit authorities;
- \$50 million for highway bridge repairs; and
- \$5.7 million for operational assistance for ferry services.

Representative Kane said other provisions in the budget include:

- a \$475 million allocation for the Commonwealth Cares for Children (C3) grant program to support and stabilize the early education and care workforce and address the operational costs at state childcare programs;
- protections for tenants facing eviction who have applied for emergency rental assistance but are still waiting for their request to be processed;
- authorization for the Massachusetts Health Connector to implement a 2-year pilot program to extend eligibility for premium assistance payments or point-of-service cost-sharing subsidies for applicants at or below 500 per cent of the federal poverty guidelines; and
- a requirement that the House and Senate Clerks make reports submitted by state agencies, departments and quasi-state agencies publicly available in an accessible, searchable format on the General Court's website, while also creating and maintaining an archive of all such reports and making it available online in a searchable format.

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