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Representative Kane supports \$58B state budget for Fiscal Year 2025

BOSTON – State Representative Hannah Kane (R-Shrewsbury) recently supported a \$58 billion state budget that sets spending priorities for the new fiscal year that begins on July 1.

House members conducted three days of debate on the annual appropriations bill beginning on April 24, disposing of 1,495 amendments, including a handful of Republican-sponsored proposals backed by Representative Kane in an unsuccessful attempt to further boost local aid and address the costs associated with the migrant shelter crisis. The final amended budget was approved on a vote of 153-4 on April 26.

During floor debate, Representative Kane successfully advocated for the inclusion of several local initiatives for her district. Included in the House budget proposal is \$50,000 for Shrewsbury Youth and Family Services, \$10,000 for accessibility improvements to the bathrooms at Dean Park, and \$10,000 for improvements to the gazebo at the Shrewsbury Town Common. Representative Kate Donaghue (D-Westborough) co-filed an amendment with Representative Kane for funding to purchase radios for Westborough's ambulances, included at \$27,000.

In addition to these local priorities, Representative Kane and Representative Jay Livingstone (D-Boston) successfully advocated for the re-appropriation of previously appropriated funding for the replacement of stolen SNAP benefits, allowing funding allocated in previous years to be spent in Fiscal Year 2025. The Food System Caucus, which Representative Kane co-founded and co-chairs, supported several priority amendments related to Massachusetts' food system. Thanks to the advocacy of Food System Caucus members, the House budget includes \$37,401,330 for the Massachusetts Emergency Food Assistance Program (MEFAP), \$150,000 for the UMass Extension program, and \$25,000 for Rachel's Table. Representative Kane, in her role as House Chair of the MA Caucus of Women Legislators, was pleased to see that the amendment filed by the Caucus board to allocate \$50,000 to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Caucus in 2025 through a year of programming was successful in being adopted.

Representative Kane noted the House budget funds Chapter 70 education aid at \$6.86 billion, while boosting per pupil minimum aid to \$104 per student and fully funding the fourth year of the goal rate mandated under the 2019 Student Opportunity Act. In total, the House spending proposal represents an increase of \$308.7 million in Chapter 70 aid compared to current spending levels, with Shrewsbury scheduled to receive \$21,595,260 and Westborough scheduled to receive \$12,309,756 in direct education aid for the new fiscal year that begins July 1.

While Representative Kane said the increase in education-related aid was welcome news, she expressed concerns about the level of Unrestricted General Government Aid (UGGA) included in the House budget, which is set at \$1.28 billion, a figure which is \$12.7 million higher than the current fiscal year but \$25 million less than what Governor Healey proposed in her budget in January. Representative Kane noted that UGGA funding is critical to supporting a variety of municipal services, including teachers, police, firefighters, libraries,

and senior centers. Under the House proposal, Shrewsbury is set to receive \$3,363,461 and Westborough set to receive \$1,399,192 in unrestricted state aid.

In an attempt to address this shortfall and better assist communities that are struggling to balance their budgets, Representative Kane supported a Republican leadership sponsored amendment to eliminate the \$35 million included in the House budget to subsidize free phone calls for prisoners and instead reallocate this funding to the UGGA account. The proposed amendment was defeated on a vote of 29-128.

Representative Kane noted that the House budget offers additional state assistance to municipalities by providing a 100 percent reimbursement rate for charter school aid (\$198.9 million), regional school transportation (\$99.5 million), and homeless student transportation (\$28.6 million). It also funds the Special Education Circuit Breaker at \$492.7 million.

Although the House budget does not address the ongoing migrant crisis that has stretched the state's emergency housing assistance program to its limits, Representative Kane supported a series of amendments designed to rein in the costs of the program, which has ballooned to more than \$1 billion this fiscal year, and to ensure that Massachusetts residents and veterans are not excluded from receiving assistance. These amendments, which were unsuccessful, included:

- A proposal filed by Second Assistant Minority Leader Paul Frost (R-Auburn) requiring the emergency housing assistance program to only be available to Massachusetts residents who have resided within the Commonwealth for at least three months, with exemptions granted to victims of domestic violence and those whose living situation has been affected by a fire or other natural disaster that occurred in Massachusetts;
- Another proposal filed by Representative Frost to require the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities and the Department of Housing and Community Development to give priority consideration to residents who have resided in the Commonwealth for a minimum of 12 consecutive months and who are on the waitlist for the emergency housing assistance program, when space in the program becomes available; and
- A proposal filed by House Minority Leader Bradley H. Jones, Jr. (R-North Reading) to prioritize eligibility for the emergency housing assistance program for honorably discharged homeless veterans.

Representative Kane also co-sponsored two amendments offered by the Republican leadership that would have updated the requirements of the MBTA Communities Act, neither of which was accepted. Amendment 732 directed the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities (EOHLC) to provide a minimum of a 1-year extension to all municipalities to become compliant with the MBTA Communities Act from their originally assigned deadline. The second amendment would have required EOHLC to take into consideration and count all projects completed within a municipality in the last 5 years that would meet the requirements of the MBTA Communities Act, towards bringing a municipality into compliance with the law.

Representative Kane said the House budget proposal also provides for:

- A state tax amnesty that is expected to recoup \$75 million in uncollected tax revenues for the state;
- A temporary increase in the annual cap on the Conservation Land Tax Credit, which plays a critical role in conserving land and creating more accessible and open public space;
- Maintaining eligibility criteria and services for the Personal Care Attendant (PCA) program at Fiscal Year 2024 levels;
- Mandatory insurance coverage for standard fertility preservation services for cancer patients whose fertility has been directly or indirectly impacted by the disease or the treatment of the disease;
- \$13.8 million for the creation of a Disaster Relief and Resiliency Fund;
- \$15 million for the Healthy Incentives Program

- \$475 million to fully fund the Commonwealth Cares for Children (C3) early education grant program;
- \$17.5 million in Head Start grants;
- \$10 million for an Early Education and Care (EEC) Educator Scholarship Program;
- \$10 million for an EEC Educator Loan Forgiveness Program;
- \$190 million to continue providing universal school meals;
- \$394.7 million for state universities;
- \$403.5 million for community colleges;
- \$783.8 million for the UMass system;
- \$298 million in higher education scholarship funding, included \$80 million for expanding the MassGrant+ program;
- \$219 million for the Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program (MRVP), an increase of \$39.4 million;
- \$197 million for the Residential Assistance for Families in Transition (RAFT) program, an increase of \$7.4 million;
- \$555 million for the MBTA, including \$75 million for capital investments and \$40 million for workforce training and recruiting;
- \$50 million to increase nursing facility rates;
- \$28.2 million in Councils on Aging grants, which will allow for a formula increase from \$14 to \$15 per elder;
- \$194.4 million for the Bureau of Substance Addiction Services;
- \$3.085 million for grants and contracts with substance use programs, including \$2 million for RIZE MA to assist in their work to end the opioid epidemic;
- \$14.2 million for statewide and community-based suicide prevention programs;
- \$1.25 million for prostate cancer awareness, education and research;

The budget now moves to the Senate for its consideration, with debate expected to start the week of May 20.

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