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Commonwealth of Massachusetts

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Representative Kane rejects proposal to provide another \$426M for migrant shelter crisis

Criticizes conference committee report for lack of reforms to control costs

BOSTON – State Representative Hannah Kane (R-Shrewsbury) recently opposed a supplemental budget conference committee report that would provide up to \$426 million in surplus funding for the state’s emergency housing system, saying the proposal lacks meaningful reforms and does nothing to stem the flow of new migrant arrivals seeking shelter who have stretched the program to its limits.

The conference committee report, filed as House Bill 4582, calls for the state to commit \$251 million in transitional escrow account funding to address the migrant crisis and authorizes the State Comptroller to transfer an additional \$175 million from the same fund to help cover program costs for Fiscal Year 2025, which begins on July 1. The transitional escrow account currently has a balance of \$863 million, which means the new proposal would drain nearly half of its funding.

Despite Representative Kane’s opposition, the conference committee report was accepted by the House of Representatives on a vote of 120-36 on April 25, with all 25 House Republicans voting against the measure, along with 10 Democrats and one Independent. It was subsequently enacted on a vote of 123-35, with all Republican members again voting against the bill.

With the latest shelter appropriation pushing the total amount of emergency assistance funding approved this fiscal year to more than \$1 billion, Representative Kane echoed remarks made by House Minority Leader Bradley H. Jones, Jr. (R-North Reading) during floor debate that this significant funding investment is “crowding out” other important budget priorities, including aid to cities and towns that are struggling to balance their municipal budgets.

Representative Kane also said the “reforms” included in the supplemental budget to limit how long families can remain in the shelter system are too open-ended and may only perpetuate the problem. Beginning on June 1, House Bill 4582 imposes a nine-month time limit for families in the shelter system, but it also allows program participants who meet certain qualifications to secure up to two 90-day extensions to continue to receive services. After their time is up, recipients can also apply for a hardship waiver, but the bill is silent on what happens to those who are denied a hardship waiver.

Representative Kane had previously voted against the supplemental budget when it first came before the House of Representatives on March 6. At the time, she raised concerns that without implementing meaningful reforms, many longtime Massachusetts residents could find themselves being denied access to housing assistance due to the continued arrival of individuals and families from out of state seeking shelter.

During the March 6 House debate, Representative Kane supported a proposal by Second Assistant Minority Leader Paul Frost (R-Auburn) to restrict program participation to individuals who have resided in the

Commonwealth for at least six months. The proposal included a carveout exempting victims of domestic violence as well as persons impacted by a fire or other natural disaster that occurred in Massachusetts, but it was defeated on a roll call vote of 29-125.

House Bill 4582 is now before Governor Maura Healey for her review.

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