



COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS
STATE SENATOR
MICHAEL O. MOORE
SECOND WORCESTER DISTRICT
State House, Room 215, Boston, MA 02133 (617) 722-1485

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Contact: Jason Palitsch
(617) 722-1485

SENATE PASSES BUDGET FOR FISCAL YEAR 2012

Boston – The Massachusetts Senate on Thursday voted to pass a \$29.2 billion budget for fiscal year 2012. The spending plan remains consistent with the Senate’s goal to use funding reductions, ongoing revenue initiatives and one-time revenues to find a balanced approach of cuts and revenues. The budget plan also marks the smallest year to year spending increase in the past decade.

Although consensus revenue numbers from January resulted in a 7 percent increase of \$20.52 billion, precise and educated cuts were needed to achieve the goal of a budget with no new taxes and a reduced dependence on the state’s stabilization fund and creating a spending plan based on transparency, accountability and performance.

“Through hard work – and hard choices – the Senate was able to pass a balanced budget that includes no new taxes and no tax increases,” said Sen. Moore. “I am particularly pleased that the Senate voted to restore some of the funding that had been cut from the Special Education Circuit Breaker fund, as well as to reform municipal health insurance in a manner that will provide real help to cities and towns.”

By utilizing program integrity initiatives to identify programs where funding will be best utilized and maximum efficiencies can be achieved, the Senate targeted programs aimed to provide financial assistance to education initiatives, municipalities and families.

In an effort to provide relief to schools across the Commonwealth, the Senate voted to boost its Special Education Circuit Breaker funding by \$11 million, increasing the reimbursement amount for school districts for the necessary cost of educating children with special needs. Members also unanimously approved an increase of \$3 million for Regional School Transportation from the House budget and FY11 spending.

Although local aid numbers were reduced from last year, the final Senate budget does provide relief to municipalities, including a \$2 million increase for the PILOT program for reimbursements to cities and towns in lieu of taxes on state-owned land - filed by Sen. Moore - which represents a \$2 million increase above the previous fiscal year. Additionally, it includes a plan that provides \$750 million in savings through rate changes and procurement reforms in Medicaid.

Sen. Moore also noted the passage of an amendment he filed to fund an independent evaluation to determine potential cost savings in Massachusetts Sheriffs' Offices. A 2009 state law established a Special Commission to investigate and study the reorganization or consolidation of the Sheriffs’ offices. To assist the Commission in its work, this amendment allows the commission to contract with an independent, outside organization - at a cost not to exceed \$50,000 - to conduct a fiscal analysis of the potential cost savings and other efficiencies that may be achieved. The Commission was organized for the purpose of making an investigation and study relative to the reorganization or consolidation of Sheriffs’ Offices.

Other education initiatives approved on the floor of the Senate include a \$400,000 increase for expanding Advanced Placement (AP) programs and \$500,000 for new pipeline funding for programs that support careers in

fields related to science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM).

Maintaining a focus on residents in need, the Senate increased its clothing allowance to families with dependent children from \$40 to \$75. The Women, Infants and Children (WIC) Nutrition Program - which provides supplemental foods, health care referrals, and nutrition education for low-income pregnant, postpartum women, and to infants and children up to age 5 who are found to be at nutritional risk – was increased by \$1 million.

The Senate approved reforms to the State’s Emergency Assistance Program, a transitional program that provides temporary housing for families, teens and adult individuals who find themselves homeless. Changes move from a system that provides temporary housing to a system that encourages permanent housing by reducing dependence on hotels and increasing consistent stable housing.

The Senates proposes a plan to reform municipal health insurance to give cities and towns the authority to more easily transfer subscribers to the Group Insurance Commission (GIC) or implement health plan features that are tied to what is offered by the GIC. The plan could provide millions in savings, while providing municipal employees and retirees a strong voice without a veto.

Currently, the Massachusetts unemployment rate is steadily declining. Moving forward, the Senate is taking measures to ensure that the economy maintains its upward trajectory. These include \$3 million to restore the Youth-At-Risk Summer Jobs account targeted at reducing juvenile delinquency in high risk areas by developing and implementing year-round employment programs for at risk youth and increased funding for economic development grants.

An extension of the sunset clause for active duty military personnel who are also public employees was adopted by a unanimous vote, allowing service members to receive differential pay if their base pay military salary is less than their base pay public service salary. The current law is set to expire on September 11, 2011. That date is extended to September 11, 2014.

The Senate also adopted significant changes to the Commonwealth’s indigent defender program and the Massachusetts Committee for Public Counsel Services. Reforms call for a split of 30 percent public and 70 percent private defenders from the current 10 percent/90 percent split and requires the plan to be implemented in 1 year. The Senate also proposes a \$50 increase in the indigent counsel fee.

Funding was increased by \$1 million for the Shannon Grant program, named for former Senator Charles E. Shannon, Jr., which provides resources to communities with a demonstrated gang and youth violence problem. Bringing the total to \$5.5 million, this targeted funding will offer lasting benefits for communities by encompassing prevention, intervention, and suppression programs utilizing law enforcement, community-based organizations and government agencies.

The Senate increased spending by \$63 million dollars as a result of expected increased departmental and federal revenues. The budget will now go to a conference committee where three members from the Senate and three members from the House of Representatives will negotiate a compromise spending plan to be sent to the Governor to be signed into law.

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