

LEGISLATIVE BULLETIN

To: All School Committee Members and Superintendents
From: Stephen J. Finnegan Esq., MASC General Counsel
Re: F.Y. 2022 House Ways & Means Budget Proposal
Date: April 14, 2021

HOUSE WAYS & MEANS FY 2022 BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS RELEASED

Chapter 70

On April 14, 2021, the House Ways & Means Committee released its FY 2022 Budget recommendations. Among the recommendations from the House Ways and Means Committee is a significant increase in Chapter 70. The Committee proposal for the FY 2022 state budget recommends a total appropriation of \$5.503 billion, a record amount of funding resulting in an increase of \$219.5 million over FY 2021, and \$21.8 million more than the budget proposed by the Governor. The Committee maintains that this investment will fully fund 1/6th of the Student Opportunity Act (SOA) goal rates. Education investments also include \$55 million in one-time funding for districts to address uncertainties around enrollment and support students in their learning recovery. The House Ways and Means Committee reached a local aid funding agreement that is designed to provide certainty and greater predictability for local governments and funds the first year of the Student Opportunity Act (SOA) and ensures that we get back on schedule to fully implement the SOA.

Despite dire revenue projections over recent months, the Commonwealth's revenue projections have steadily improved over the last year. The consensus revenue estimate for 2022 of \$30.12 billion represents a 3.5% growth over the revised FY 2021 projections. Tax receipts through April have put the state ahead of revenue projections for the current FY year by 3.5%. We appreciate that when revenues are available education funding is a priority for the Legislature. MASC is particularly pleased with the new Speaker of the House, Ron Mariano, who previously had been a long term member of the Quincy School Committee.

The House brought the total funding for the municipal account in Unrestricted General Government Aid (UGGA) to \$1.168 billion. The UGGA has beneficial effects on tight local budgets and helps to reduce the sometimes contentious relationships between schools and municipalities in the quest to adequately fund their respective budgets. School Committees, in general, appreciate the House Budget proposals.

SPECIAL EDUCATION CIRCUIT BREAKER

The Special Education Circuit Breaker provides state funding for the extraordinary expenses associated with certain special education expenses. This account is supposed to provide state funding for 75% of all approved costs that exceed 4 times the statewide average per pupil foundation budget, as defined in Chapter 70, for the previous fiscal year. The House Ways and Means Committee has proposed funding the circuit breaker at \$367.7 million. Generally, the Senate budget increases funding for this account and MASC will continue to advocate for full funding of this account. The students benefited by this account are the most vulnerable population that school districts serve.

REGIONAL SCHOOL TRANSPORTATION

Regional school transportation has been funded by the House Ways and Means budget for a total of \$82.1 million, which is \$6.3 million more than the Governor's budget. MASC will join with like-minded education advocates to increase the funding for regional school transportation.

over

CHARTER SCHOOL REIMBURSEMENT

Monies for districts sending students to charter schools were increased by the House Ways and Means Committee to \$154.6 million. The funding of this account represents an increase of \$11 million over the Governor's budget. The House Ways and Means Committee reached a local aid funding agreement that is designed to provide certainty and greater predictability for local governments and funds the first year of the Student Opportunity Act (SOA) and ensures that we get back on schedule to fully implement the SOA.

HOMELESS STUDENT TRANSPORTATION

The House Ways and Means Committee recommends funding the McKinney-Vento program at \$14.5 million for the transportation of homeless students. Several years ago State Auditor Bump issued a ruling determining that the homeless transportation requirement constituted an unfunded mandate. MASC will join with other educational associations to ensure that this amount will be sufficient to meet the Auditor's funding recommendations. We note that the prior year funding was limited to \$1 million.

METCO

The House Ways and Means budget recommended increasing total funding for the METCO account to a total of \$23.6 million. MASC, in conjunction with other education associations, will continue to advocate for the METCO account as it wends its way to the Senate.

RECOVERY HIGH SCHOOLS

This account is funded in the House Ways and Means Committee's proposed budget in the amount of \$2.7 million.

RURAL SCHOOL DISTRICTS

The House Ways and Means proposed budget for FY 2022 contains a long-sought-after provision concerning rural education that MASC and numerous other legislators (particularly from western and central Massachusetts and the Joint Committee on Education) have long advocated for.

To that end, a rural growth fund has been added to the Outside Sections of the House Ways and Means recommendations (so called) and may be found on page 238 of the FY 2022 House Ways and Means Budget Proposal.