

KAREN E. SPILKA  
PRESIDENT  
OF THE SENATE



ROBERT A. DELEO  
SPEAKER OF THE  
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

THE GENERAL COURT OF MASSACHUSETTS  
STATE HOUSE, BOSTON, 02133-1053

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT:  
[Contact info]

## MASSACHUSETTS LEGISLATURE PASSES BILL TO HELP VULNERABLE RESIDENTS, SUPPORT SCHOOLS AMID THE COVID-19 PUBLIC HEALTH CRISIS

*Provisions address homelessness, MCAS testing requirements*

BOSTON **April 2020** – State Representative **Carole Fiola** along with their colleagues in the Massachusetts House and Senate on Thursday passed legislation that supports those experiencing homelessness and provides testing and budgetary flexibility to school districts.

“The wide-ranging effects of the COVID-19 outbreak on our schools and communities demand action, and the Legislature took steps to help those most in need and provide flexibility to our schools so that they may operate effectively during this public health crisis,” said **House Speaker Robert A. DeLeo (D – Winthrop)**. “By providing emergency funding for the homeless, we are protecting those most at risk. I appreciate the leadership of Senate President Spilka as well as the work of Chairs Michlewitz and Peisch in moving these critical provisions forward.”

“This legislation helps a wide variety of entities deal with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic,” said **Representative Aaron Michlewitz, Co-Chair of the Joint Committee on Ways & Means (D – Boston)**. “Whether it’s aiding our cities and towns with the needs of their school districts, to helping homeless providers have greater flexibility in protecting those most in need, the Legislature stands ready to help those most affected by this public health crisis.”

“This bill reflects the Senate’s continued commitment to act quickly to address the challenges and disruptions posed by COVID-19, and provide relief for taxpayers, students and educators, and municipalities,” said **Senator Michael J. Rodrigues (D – Westport), Chair of the Senate Committee on Ways and Means**. “I applaud Senate President Spilka for her leadership in this uncertain time, and my colleagues in the Senate for their collaboration in supporting residents of the Commonwealth.”

“This legislation provides much-needed relief to school districts as they face this unprecedented emergency,” said **Representative Alice Peisch, Co-Chair of the Joint Committee on Education (D – Wellesley)**. “The bill waives the MCAS requirement while giving the Commissioner and

Board of Elementary and Secondary Education the flexibility to modify or waive the competency determination, and requires the Commissioner to delay the due date for the improvement plans required under the Student Opportunity Act. These provisions will allow districts to focus on what is most important - students' health, safety, and continued learning. I'd like to thank Speaker DeLeo and Chairman Michlewitz for their leadership, and the members of the Education Committee for their hard work and support."

"Cancelling MCAS testing for the remainder of this school year will enable our teachers and students to focus on learning and personal well-being as we continue to navigate the current public health emergency," said **Senator Jason Lewis, Senate Chair of the Joint Committee on Education (D – Winchester)**. "Legislators heard loud and clear from teachers, parents and superintendents that this was the right thing to do."

"The COVID-19 pandemic has created unprecedented challenges that require ongoing collaboration at all levels," said **House Minority Leader Bradley H. Jones, Jr. (R – North Reading)**. "By addressing education testing, housing assistance and the MBTA budget, the House and Senate are building on the steps we've already taken to facilitate municipal governance and make unemployment benefits more accessible. There is still much more to be done, and we must continue to work together to help ease the burden on the Commonwealth's residents during this public health crisis."

This latest relief package known as *An Act to Further Address Challenges Faced by Municipalities, School Districts and State authorities Resulting from COVID-19*, includes the following components.

***Student Requirements and District Operations.*** To address disruptions caused by the closure of K-12 schools due to COVID-19, the legislation waives the MCAS requirements for the 2019-2020 academic year and allows DESE to modify or waive competency determination requirements related to high school graduation.

In order to comply with measures under the newly implemented Student Opportunity Act, the legislation would require the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) Commissioner to extend the deadlines for school districts to submit their three-year plans to address educational disparities in student subgroups. This deadline shall be extended to May 15, 2020, or later, as determined by the Commissioner.

The legislation also provides budgetary flexibility for regional school as a result of COVID-19.

***Helping Vulnerable Populations.*** In keeping with the Legislature's commitment to protecting vulnerable populations, the legislation repurposes existing homelessness funds that currently support services that can't be provided due to the COVID-19 outbreak. The legislation redirects funding to address immediate and critical homelessness needs resulting from the public health emergency.

***MBTA Budget Flexibility.*** The legislation also provides the MBTA additional budgetary flexibility amid the COVID-19 emergency.

The bill, which is the latest action by the Legislature to address the COVID-19 public health crisis and its effects on Massachusetts, was signed into law by the Governor on April 11.

###