



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
STATE HOUSE, BOSTON 02133-1008

ROBERT A. DELEO
Speaker

ROOM 356
OFFICE PHONE
(617) 722-2500

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

COVID-19 House Response

House Passes Legislation to Address Challenges Faced by School Systems and Vulnerable Residents

April 3, 2020 – BOSTON – On April 2, **House Speaker Robert A. DeLeo** and **State Representative Carole Fiola** along with their colleagues in the House of Representatives passed legislation to provide support to school systems and those persons experiencing homelessness, and to prevent the shut-off of essential municipal services amid the COVID-19 public health emergency.

“This public health emergency is a stark reminder that we must lift up the most vulnerable among us,” said **Speaker DeLeo (D – Winthrop)**. “This legislation provides emergency funding for the homeless and prevents shut-offs of essential services for residents. I thank Chair Michlewitz for his work to move these vital provisions forward.”

State Representative Carole Fiola stated “In unprecedented times, the legislature is working to protect vulnerable populations and make amendments to regulations to help our Commonwealth move forward and come out strong.

The legislation includes the following provisions.

- 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.
- Extends deadlines for schools filing reports under the Student Opportunity Act to May 15 or a later date as determined by the Department of Early and Secondary Education (DESE) Commissioner, provides the DESE Commissioner the authority to waive or

modify the administration of the MCAS testing, and gives regional school authorities budget flexibility during the public health emergency.

- Prevents the shut-off of essential services at municipal level due to an inability to pay due to the public health emergency.

“This relief package that the House passed today will help a wide variety of people deal with the effects of COVID-19,” said **Representative Aaron Michlewitz, Co-Chair of the Joint Committee on Ways & Means (D-Boston)**. “From our cities and towns dealing with the needs of their school districts, to helping homeless providers have greater flexibility in protecting our most vulnerable members of society, the House stands ready to help those most affected by this public health crisis.”

"In addition to the delayed Student Opportunity Act deadline and MCAS waiver, the bill grants necessary discretion to the Commissioner and the Board of Education to make whatever modifications deemed appropriate for competency determinations based on timely information," said **Representative Alice H. Peisch, Co-Chair of the Joint Committee on Education (D-Wellesley)**. "The flexibility contained in this legislation is essential for our students and districts as the Commonwealth faces this constantly evolving crisis. I'd like to thank Speaker DeLeo, Chair Michlewitz, the Education Committee and their respective staffs for their hard work on this bill supporting students across Massachusetts."

The bill will now go to the Senate.

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