



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
MASSACHUSETTS SENATE

SENATOR JAMES B. ELDRIDGE

Middlesex and Worcester District

STATE HOUSE, ROOM 320
BOSTON, MA 02133-1053
TEL: (617) 722-1120
FAX: (617) 722-1089

JAMES.ELDRIDGE@MASENATE.GOV
WWW.MASENATE.GOV

Chairman
COMMITTEE ON FINANCIAL SERVICES
Vice Chairman
COMMITTEE ON COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
AND SMALL BUSINESSES
and
SENATE COMMITTEE ON GLOBAL WARMING
AND CLIMATE CHANGE

DISTRICT OFFICE
225 MAIN STREET, ROOM 106
MARLBOROUGH, MA 01752
TEL: (978) 460-8564

June 6, 2017

The Honorable Karen Spilka, Chair
Senate Committee on Ways and Means
State House, Room 212
Boston, MA 02133

The Honorable Sal DiDomenico, Vice-Chair
Senate Committee on Ways and Means
State House, Room 208
Boston, MA 02133

The Honorable Viriato deMacedo, Ranking Minority Member
Senate Committee on Ways and Means
State House, Room 313C
Boston, MA 02133

RE: FY18 Budget Conference Committee

Dear Chairwoman Spilka, Vice-Chairman DiDomenico, and Senator deMacedo:

Thank you for your thoughtful leadership on the Senate membership's budget priorities over these past months. I am deeply grateful that our budget continues to invest in critical policy areas. It is my hope that the conference committee report will support these investments by retaining crucial portions of the Senate budget that support our most vulnerable communities. The Alternative Housing Voucher Program (AHVP), Residential Assistance for Families in Transition (RAFT), and the foreclosure counseling grants earmark are integral to addressing urgent housing concerns. Additionally, the Earned Income Tax Credit's accommodation of domestic violence survivors, the Service Employee Compensation language, and investment in Adult Basic Education promote the financial stability of at-

risk workers and families. Finally, increasing funding for the Department of Environmental Protection and the Community Preservation Act Trust Fund will help protect our natural resources and allow local communities to flourish. I commend Chairwoman Spilka and her dedicated staff for their work to ensure that these key investments continue to increase the strength and resiliency of the people, communities, and natural resources that comprise our Commonwealth. As you engage in the challenging task of finalizing a budget for Fiscal Year 2018, I would like to bring to your attention several items of particular importance to me.

HOUSING

1. Alternative Housing Voucher Program (AHVP) – Accept Senate appropriation of \$5,500,000.

The Alternative Housing Voucher Program (AHVP) was established in 1995 and provided \$4 million in funding, which supported 800 vouchers. Due to funding cuts and rent increases it currently funds only 560 vouchers. Since 1995 the demand for housing for people with disabilities has significantly increased. There are currently over 2,131 people on the AHVP waiting list. The Senate appropriation of \$5,500,000 would make a significant difference and achieve the program's original goal of 800 vouchers. **Please adopt the Senate appropriation of \$5,500,000 for line item 7004-9030 in the FY18 final conference committee budget.**

2. Residential Assistance for Families in Transition (RAFT) – Accept Senate appropriation of \$18,500,000.

RAFT is an important tool for preventing family homelessness. The program enables families that experience unemployment or other challenges to avoid homelessness through assistance needed to maintain housing or move to a new home. The Senate budget increases FY17 RAFT funding by \$5,500,000. For over 12 years RAFT has proven to be a wise investment and this line item would protect more of those who need housing assistance. **I, therefore, respectfully request that the FY18 final conference committee budget include the Senate appropriation of \$18,500,000 and the RAFT language update in line item 7004-9316.**

3. Homeless Individuals Assistance – Accept House appropriation of \$46,405,000.

Homelessness remains a crisis in Massachusetts. Since 1990, the homeless population in the Commonwealth has doubled. Homeless Individuals Assistance provides services to individuals who are homeless or in danger of becoming homeless. These services include assistance to programs that provide transitional housing, helping individuals avoid entry into shelter, and aiding individuals leaving shelter. **Please accept the House appropriation of \$46,405,000 for line item 7004-0102 in the FY18 final conference committee budget.**

4. Loan Originator Administration and Consumer Counseling – Accept Senate retained revenue of \$2,350,000 and \$1,300,000 earmark.

The Division of Banks (DOB) utilizes the Senate budget earmarks for foreclosure counseling grants to help struggling homeowners achieve the best possible outcome. This amendment earmarks

improve education by fully funding public schools for special education, health care, English language learners, and low-income students. The Senate budget ensures that FBRC's recommendations are fully realized by establishing an implementation schedule and enumerating specific funding rates. These changes would help close the achievement gap in our Commonwealth by providing full funding to our schools. **Therefore, I respectfully request that Sections 36, 75-83 of the Senate budget be adopted in the FY18 final conference committee budget.**

5. District Determined Measures – Adopt Sections 72 and 84 of the Senate budget.

These sections prevent the Department of Education from utilizing student testing standards to measure an educator's impact on student learning. Including this data results in flawed evaluations that ultimately harm student learning. Tests may reflect the life circumstances of students and are thus unreliable sources of measuring student learning. Eliminating testing data from teacher evaluations helps both educators and students achieve better outcomes. **Therefore, I respectfully request that Sections 72 and 84 of the Senate budget be adopted in the FY18 final conference committee budget.**

LOCAL COMMUNITIES

6. District Local Technical Assistance (DLTA) – Accept House appropriation of \$2,800,000.

DLTA funds distributed among the state's 13 regional planning agencies (RPAs) provide Massachusetts' cities and towns with technical assistance to help foster regional collaboration, economic development, housing production, best practices in zoning, and environmental protection. As municipalities across the Commonwealth continue to face challenging budgets, many are unable to support the kind of planning needed to achieve thoughtful and sustainable growth and development. In fact, many small communities have no planning staff at all. RPAs are critical resources for communities, because they have strong working relationships with their member municipalities. **Therefore, please adopt the House appropriation of \$2,800,000 for District Local Technical Assistance in line item 1599-0026.**

7. Municipal Libraries Local Aid – Accept Senate appropriation of \$9,750,000.

Municipal Libraries Local Aid provides funds to libraries to restore regular hours, buy computers for public use, or fund capital improvements. Public libraries provide online resources to residents, internet access for underserved communities, free access to print items, and community gathering places. Roughly 22,000 people access library online resources each day. **Therefore, I respectfully request that the Senate appropriation of \$9,750,000 for line item 7000-9501 be adopted in the FY18 final conference committee budget.**

8. Community Preservation Act Trust Fund Increase – Adopt Section 53 of Senate budget.

For almost two decades the Community Preservation Act (CPA) has been a successful smart growth tool for local communities. In my district, CPA funds have been used to repurpose historic buildings into affordable housing in Northborough, create a community park in Stow, restore Harvard Town Hall, and protect over 60 acres of open space and water resources in Hudson. This section would increase the deed transfer fee to \$45 so that the CPA Trust Fund can achieve a 30% match for

participating cities and towns. **I respectfully request that Section 53 of the Senate budget be adopted in the FY18 final conference committee budget.**

LAW AND PUBLIC SAFETY

1. MCAD Administration – Accept Senate appropriation of \$3,433,199.

The Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination (MCAD) is the Commonwealth's chief civil rights agency charged with the authority to investigate, prosecute, adjudicate and resolve cases of discrimination. MCAD receives funding that is disproportionate to its caseload, particularly when measured against the civil rights enforcement agencies of comparable states, such as Connecticut and New York. The work of this agency is crucial to the protection of civil rights in the Commonwealth. **Therefore, I respectfully request the adoption of the Senate appropriation of \$3,433,199 for line-item 0940-0100 in the FY18 final conference committee budget.**

2. Massachusetts Legal Assistance Services (MLAC) – Accept Senate appropriation of \$20,000,000.

An adequately funded and fully functioning justice system is paramount. The state trial courts and civil legal aid programs have been seriously underfunded in recent years, making the ability to deliver quality justice increasingly difficult. In recent years, legal aid attorneys in Massachusetts have been struggling with dwindling IOLTA funds, dramatic increases in client loads, and fewer staff to maintain operations. The budget cuts to this line item have added more strain on our overburdened and underfunded judicial system. As a former legal aid attorney, I believe that it is critical that the state increase funding for civil legal services which help residents facing eviction and foreclosure, child custody and support issues, denial of health care coverage, unemployment benefits appeals, domestic violence and elder abuse. **Therefore, please adopt the Senate appropriation of \$20,000,000 for line item 0321-1600 in the FY18 final conference committee budget.**

PUBLIC HEALTH AND SERVICES

1. Healthy Relationships Grant Program – Accept Senate appropriation of \$150,000.

The Healthy Relationships Grant Program promotes healthy relationships by addressing and preventing dating violence among Massachusetts' teenagers. The \$150,000 program would fund 10 schools to deliver an anti-teen dating violence curriculum to their students. There is strong evidence that the factors contributing to the murder of three to four young women every day across our country can be prevented through education about healthy relationships, awareness of how to identify and prevent violent relationships, and a commitment on the part of schools and communities to tackle unhealthy, and often dangerous, relationship and communication norms. The skills that Massachusetts' teenagers will gain through the Healthy Relationships Grant Program will both save lives and arm our young people with knowledge and confidence that will help them in their personal relationships, at school, and professionally, throughout their lives. The skills also stand to reduce costs related to trauma around violence and murder and the costs of incarceration of perpetrators. **I, therefore, respectfully request the FY18 final conference committee budget include the Senate appropriation of \$150,000 for line item 4513-1131.**

2. Massachusetts Emergency Food Assistance Program (MEFAP) – Accept House appropriation of \$17,685,000.

The Massachusetts Emergency Food Assistance Program (MEFAP) serves many emergency food providers through four regional food bank distribution centers. Currently, 138 million meals are required in the Commonwealth for everyone in need to have three meals a day. MEFAP also helps to fill the gap for the 37 percent of individuals in need across the Commonwealth who do not qualify for government benefits. An increase in funding for this line item is necessary to meet the needs for this vital program. **I, therefore, respectfully request that the FY18 final conference committee budget include the House appropriation for line item 2511-0105 at \$17,685,000.**

3. Earned Income Tax Credit – Adopt Section 56 of Senate Budget.

The Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) effectively slows the growth of income inequality at the state and federal levels. The current proposal includes a crucial reform by allowing married filers who are living apart from their spouse because of domestic violence to claim the credit without filing a joint return. The EITC encourages the shift from welfare to work and ultimately transitions earners off of the credit as their wages rise. Most families use the credit to pay for necessities, such as repairing homes, maintaining cars used for commuting, and obtaining additional training. This program is integral to helping working families achieve financial stability. **Therefore, I respectfully request that the FY18 final conference committee budget adopt Section 56 of the Senate budget.**

4. Service Employee Compensation – Adopt the language in line item 1599-6903 of the Senate budget.

Wages for direct care workers in human services agencies have stagnated even as CEO pay, management compensation, and administrative expenditures have risen proportionately to funding increases. As a result, human services organizations are plagued with high turnover and few applicants for direct care positions. This language requires human services organizations that receive state funds to apply at least 75% of those state funds to pay direct care workers a minimum wage of \$15 per hour. **I respectfully request that the FY18 final conference committee adopt the language in line item 1599-6903 of the Senate budget.**

5. Supervised Injection Facilities Impact Study – Adopt Section 102 of Senate budget.

Supervised Injection Facilities (SIF) reduce the negative effects of drug use at the individual, community, and societal levels. SIFs play a vital role in the broader public health approach to combatting the harms of drug use, such as the spread of HIV and Hepatitis C. SIFs may also allow medical providers to reach populations that may not otherwise seek treatment, including homeless individuals. **Therefore, I respectfully request that the FY18 final conference committee adopt Section 102 of the Senate budget.**

6. Suicide Prevention – Accept Senate appropriation of \$400,000.

Samaritans, Inc. provides critical services to reduce the risk of suicide, including a 24/7 crisis hotline, grief counseling, and community education. Samaritans has answered more than 577,000 calls and made over 2,050 contacts through online chat. They have also administered more than 1,350 community education and outreach workshops to more than 59,000 participants. Over the past year, Samaritans has been faced with a growing number of calls, up 5% from last year. This funding would allow Samaritans to continue its existing programs and develop new initiatives, including a text messaging service. **Therefore, I respectfully request that the FY18 final conference committee accept the Senate appropriation of \$400,000 in line item 4513-1027.**

TRANSPORTATION

1. North South Rail Link Study – Adopt Section 220 of the Senate Budget.

Closing the 1 mile void between North and South stations would better connect the state's job centers with suburban areas. The rail link has the potential to transform the Greater Boston area and the New England Region. This section requires that any study conducted by the Massachusetts Department of Transportation on the proposed North South Rail Link include: a review of the most efficient and cost effective railroad equipment and operating practices; updated ridership models; a regional economic analysis; a health impact assessment; and opportunities for phasing of construction and electrification. **I, therefore, request that the FY18 final conference committee adopt Section 220 of the Senate budget.**

2. Springfield to Boston High-Speed Rail Feasibility Study – Adopt Section 217 of Senate budget.

A high-speed rail would rectify the economic disparities between the eastern and western regions of the Commonwealth. While eastern Massachusetts flourishes, western parts of the state are falling behind. The proposed rail would create job opportunities and alleviate the lack of affordable housing. This section would provide for a study to assess the feasibility of a high-speed rail. **I, therefore, request that the FY18 final conference committee adopt Section 217 of the Senate budget.**

3. Transparency in MBTA Contract Proposals – Adopt Sections 146-47 of Senate budget.

To ensure fairness, these sections require good faith negotiations with employee organizations before the MBTA moves to privatize a core transportation service or maintenance function. It further establishes that the MassDOT labor relations appointee shall be responsible for ensuring adherence to good faith negotiation practices. **Therefore, I respectfully request that Section 146-47 of the Senate budget be adopted in the FY18 final conference committee budget.**

4. MBTA Operating Transfer and Reporting – Adopt language in line item 1595-6369 of Senate budget.

This language requires the MBTA to use the funds provided through an operating transfer to prevent diminished service levels and diminished personnel levels. As Greater Boston's population

continues to grow and the demand for public transportation increases, it is imperative that the MBTA concentrate on preserving its current services and workforce. This important requirement ensures that the MBTA prioritizes its service offerings and its employees. **I respectfully request that the language in line item 1595-6369 of the Senate budget be adopted in the FY18 final conference committee budget.**

DISTRICT PRIORITIES

1. MetroWest Free Medical Clinic – Accept Senate Appropriation of \$75,000.

The MetroWest Free Medical Program provides free medical care to those who are uninsured and underinsured throughout communities in MetroWest. The program connects with volunteer health care providers, educators, interpreters and other volunteers to make these services a reality. Funds will support the medical supplies, medical equipment, technology, and volunteer training necessary to providing ongoing medical care, health education, and health insurance enrollment assistance. The program supports a variety of services, including diabetes care, outreach to the Latino population and the support of volunteer physicians. **I, therefore, respectfully request that the FY18 final conference committee budget include the Senate appropriation for line item 4000-0300 at \$75,000.**

2. Mount Wachusett Community College (MWCC) Manufacturing and Technology Training Programs – Accept Senate appropriation of \$150,000.

This funding will allow MWCC Devens to continue offering free and low-cost advanced manufacturing training programs to people who could not otherwise afford it. By providing a trained workforce for companies that are expanding and re-locating to the region, we can address the job skills gap in our modern economy. These innovative programs are a valuable asset to the workforce in our region. **I respectfully request that the Senate appropriation of \$150,000 in line item 7509-0100 be included in the FY18 final conference committee budget.**

3. Middlesex Opioid Assessment – Accept Senate appropriation of \$25,000.

Middlesex County has been heavily impacted by the opioid epidemic. Given the complex nature of this crisis there is a need for a comprehensive and collaborative approach that will allow systems to focus their resources and approaches to bring a multi-pronged evidence-based fight against this epidemic. This funding will allow the Middlesex County District Attorney's Office to partner with key stakeholders to provide a system alignment framework and recommendations for action steps in an Opioid Prevention and Reduction Plan for Middlesex County. **I respectfully request that the FY18 final conference committee budget include the Senate appropriation of \$25,000 in line item 4512-0200 for this assessment.**

4. Open Table Food Pantry – Accept Senate appropriation of \$75,000.

Open Table offers weekly community dinner programs and food pantries to over 300 residents in Concord and Maynard, providing a crucial service to families in need. Open Table relies primarily on the generosity of over 600 volunteers and spends 89 cents of every dollar on community support. This funding would provide \$75,000 to ensure the continued operation of this critical service. **I respectfully**

request that the FY18 final conference committee budget include the Senate appropriation of \$75,000 in line item 2511-0105 for this food pantry.

5. Levi Wetherbee-Steel Farmhouse Restoration – Accept Senate appropriation of \$50,000.

The Levi Wetherbee-Steel Farm sits at the heart of the small town of Boxborough. Built in 1784, the farm was actively used for 200 years. It is now one of the few 18th century farmhouses in Massachusetts with the surrounding land intact. This funding would restore the deteriorating farmhouse for educational and cultural purposes. **I respectfully request that the FY18 final conference committee budget include the Senate appropriation of \$50,000 in line item 0526-0100.**

6. Ghiloni Park and Stevens Playground – Accept House appropriation of \$100,000.

Physical activity is essential to the growth and success of our children and it is vital that they can access safe and upgraded playgrounds and parks in their communities. This funding provides \$100,000 to provide much needed improvements to Ghiloni Park and Stevens Playground in Marlborough. **I respectfully request that the House appropriation of \$100,000 in line item 2810-0100 be included in the FY18 final conference committee budget.**

7. Maynard and Acton Senior Shuttle – Accept Senate appropriation of \$75,000.

This funding would add additional van service to an existing senior shuttle service in Maynard and Acton. The Towns of Maynard & Acton provide limited transportation for seniors and person with disabilities. Each town has one van to bring passengers to appointments. The Senior Van Program currently provides transportation for approximately 4,000 individual appointments per year. Additional van service for medical trips will free up the other vans to provide seniors with the ability to keep their non-medical appointments and maintain their independence. **Therefore, I respectfully request that the Senate appropriation of \$75,000 in line item 1595-6368 be included in the FY18 final conference committee budget.**

8. Hudson Commuter Shuttle – Accept House appropriation of \$75,000.

This amendment provides additional funding for a shuttle program in the town of Hudson. MetroWest Regional Transit Authority (MWRTA) services that extend to Hudson provide many underserved populations with access to public transportation in MetroWest. These extended MWRTA services are also important because they connect Hudson to MBTA commuter rail stations, shopping centers, and medical centers. **Therefore, I respectfully request that the House appropriation of \$75,000 in line item 1595-6368 be included in the FY18 final conference committee budget.**

9. Southborough Public Safety Complex – Accept House appropriation of \$100,000.

Southborough's fire station is housed in an outdated 1960s structure, while the nearby police station is in a converted school building that is more than 75 years old. The town is committed to maintaining police and fire services on this very visible, centrally located site, despite serious site constraints. This funding would provide \$100,000 for a much needed safety complex. **Therefore, I**

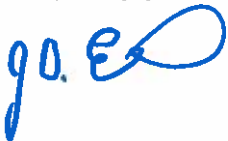
respectfully request that the House appropriation of \$100,000 in line item 8000-0600 be included in the FY18 final conference committee budget.

10. Littleton Public Safety Building – Accept House appropriation of \$50,000.

This funding would allow the Town of Littleton to upgrade telecommunications systems for its police and fire departments. Currently, the two public safety entities operate on two different radio frequencies. This can be an issue when the departments respond to emergency situations, as the portable units will only work on a single frequency. This limit on communications can also be a problem when Littleton is responding to situations in other communities or when assisting certain state agencies. The funding would allow the police department to communicate on the three main frequencies utilized by public safety services in the Commonwealth. **Therefore, I respectfully request that the House appropriation of \$50,000 in line item 8000-0600 be included in the FY18 final conference committee budget.**

Thank you for your consideration of these requests. If you have any questions, comments or concerns about any of these items, please do not hesitate to contact my office.

Very truly yours,



James B. Eldridge
State Senator
Middlesex & Worcester