



Jamie Eldridge

★ State Senator Middlesex & Worcester District ★

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Dear Friend,

With many challenges facing our state, from unemployment to the foreclosure crisis to rising health care costs, the Legislature has a lot of work on its hands this spring.



Although the economy seems to be slowly rebounding and revenue numbers have finally started to hit benchmark levels, the fact remains that we face a serious budget gap this year of several billion dollars.

As a result, the budget process will dominate the legislative agenda for much of the spring, as we make the hard choices as to which priorities we will continue to fund, what will be cut, and what new revenue, if any, we will seek out.

During the budget process, my priorities will be:

- 1) **Protecting local aid (including Chapter 70, lottery aid and regional school transportation) to cities and towns.**
- 2) **Maintaining funding for vital social safety net services** (programs to help the homeless, low-income families, at-risk children, those with disabilities, the elderly, etc.).
- 3) **Advocating for a fair, adequate and stable tax system** that will raise sufficient revenue to support our state's goals and priorities.
- 4) **Promoting budget transparency and accountability**, particularly around the issue of tax credit transparency, so that we can be sure that every penny of the public's money is being spent effectively.
- 5) **Preventing deeper cuts in spending on environmental protection, stimulating economic development, and investing in transportation.**

Approving the annual budget is one of the Legislature's most important jobs. Please be in touch to let me know your priorities for funding in the coming year.

Sincerely,

Jamie Eldridge
State Senator

SPRING 2010 NEWSLETTER

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Legislative Update

In the middle of March, each Legislative Committee must make a final decision on the bills that have been initially referred to them: whether to give the bill a favorable report, unfavorable report, or to recommend it be studied further. Receiving a favorable report from a committee is an important step towards final passage. Several of my priority bills have already received a favorable report or are likely to be reported out shortly:

Bills to Support Small Businesses

The state government has a role to play in helping small businesses grow and create jobs. Although there are many big things we can — and, hopefully, will — do this session to support small businesses, there are also small things we can do that have a big impact on the ability of small businesses in certain sectors to stay afloat.

Two bills I've filed, and that have recently received favorable committee reports, fall into this category.

S91, *An Act Relative to Gasoline Dealers*, would help level the playing field for local gas station dealers working to retain their business — in which they've invested great amounts of time and money—in the face of opposition from large, out-of-state oil companies.

And S.400, *An Act Relative to Wine Sellers*, would allow farmers who make wine, beer, or distill liquor on their farms to sell those products at State and County Fairs and recognized farmer's markets. This would help them find new customers, increase sales, and eventually grow their businesses.

Bullying Prevention Legislation

Bullying- including cyberbullying - is a widespread problem in schools across the country and here in Massachusetts, a fact that has been, sadly, reaffirmed by the recent tragedy in South Hadley.

Although some school districts have shown leadership on this issue and developed prevention plans, the fact remains that most districts do not have a plan or any type of intervention strategies to deal with bullying incidents.

Numerous bills have been filed this session to address this problem, include a bill I filed, *S. 228, An Act Relative to Bullying*. This bill would require schools to develop a bullying prevention and intervention plan in consultation with teachers, school staff, professional support personnel, administrators, students and parents. The bill also defines bullying and cyberbullying, to help protect families against bullying situations that we are seeing more and more through the internet.

The Education Committee has said that they will be reporting out a bill including much of the language from my bill in the near future.

E-Waste Bill

The Committee on the Environment recently gave a favorable report to an "E-Waste" bill, which was nearly identical to one I had filed.

This bill requires producers of electronic waste (e-waste), — i.e. computers, televisions and printers — to be financially responsible for the proper disposal of their products. The bill aims to vastly reduce the amount of hazardous chemicals leaching into landfills from e-waste disposal by increasing public accessibility of e-waste recycling, while also taking the financial burden of collecting and recycling e-waste products off of municipalities and placing it instead on the manufacturers.

Asset Development Legislation

Two bills I've filed this session to help combat poverty — S. 38, *An Act Removing Barriers to Financial Stability and Asset Development for Low-to-Moderate Income Families*, and S. 37, *An Act Relative to Workers' Pathways to Self Sufficiency* — have received a favorable report from the Committee on Children, Families and Persons with Disabilities.

Financial instability, poverty, and homelessness (or the constant threat of any of these) are a way of life for a large - and growing - number of Massachusetts families. Many more are just one lost job or serious health problem away from falling into poverty.

Research shows us that helping families develop assets - such as savings, a house or a car, or education - is one of the most effective ways of helping families get — and stay — out of poverty and achieve economic stability.

However, low-income families face substantial barriers to building these assets. Making the problem worse, many of our programs are set up in such a way that it makes it incredibly hard for families to save, get an education, or buy things like a car to drive to work.

By reforming our current programs and embracing innovative, research-tested new solutions to better promote asset development, we can help low-and-moderate income families take control of their financial lives, reducing their need for government financial assistance in the process. These programs can help ensure that everyone has the opportunity to become financially stable.