February 18, 2022

To the Honorable Senate and House of Representatives:

I am filing for your consideration a bill entitled “An Act Making Appropriations for Fiscal Year 2022 to Provide for Supplementing Certain Existing Appropriations and for Certain Other Activities and Projects.”

Revenues in Fiscal Year 2022 (FY22) have thus far exceeded initial expectations. The bill I propose today would allocate this surplus to support the Commonwealth’s ongoing response to COVID-19 and fund important investments in other areas with immediate need, like human services, child care, housing, climate change preparedness, and local infrastructure. In total, this bill proposes $2.4 billion in supplemental appropriations, at a net state cost of $1.6 billion.

This proposal provides stabilization funding for child care providers, special education schools, and human service providers to ensure access to these critical services remains available for all who need them across the state. The proposal includes $450 million to extend Commonwealth Cares for Children (C3) stabilization grants for child care providers through fiscal year 2023 (FY23). The bill also includes $140 million through FY23 for special education schools to help address direct care and clinical staffing needs. An additional $401 million is recommended for rate enhancements to human service providers, $346 million of which is supported by federal funds, for a total of $55 million in net state cost.

The bill also increases other support for children and families, especially those whose lives have been significantly disrupted by the pandemic. It recommends $100 million for matching grants to youth-focused nonprofits that will support the construction and renovation of new facilities for children across the state. It provides $60 million to maintain access to rental assistance through the Rental Assistance for Families in Transition (RAFT) program as the
federal Emergency Rental Assistance program begins to wind down, and it includes $8.4 million to continue additional short-term assistance to families fostering children during the pandemic.

This proposal also includes $700 million dedicated to the public health response to COVID-19, such as providing rapid tests and surveillance testing in congregate care settings, administering monoclonal antibody treatments, maintaining vaccination sites, and ensuring sufficient staffing in health care facilities. After anticipated FEMA reimbursements, these initiatives are expected to have a net cost of $439 million. These funds will complement the funding provided by the supplemental budget the Legislature recently sent to me and which I was pleased to sign last week.

This bill also funds a range of infrastructure and climate-related needs in local communities. It proposes $100 million for a supplemental Chapter 90 distribution, $100 million to help municipalities repair roads from winter damage, and $150 million in supplemental grants to fund climate change resiliency initiatives, including the Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) program.

Several other important investments are supported in this bill, including:

- $60 million to stabilize and support counseling, advocacy, and intervention services for victims of crime through FY25 until federal Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) resources are restored;
- $50 million to support the guardian ad litem expansion initiative described more fully below;
- $14 million to fully fund service improvements for men who are civilly committed for substance use treatment under Section 35;
- $10 million to ensure Emergency Aid to the Elderly, Disabled and Children (EAEDC) payments are uninterrupted through caseload volatility;
- $5 million to support the implementation of the new 988 emergency call line;
- $5 million for Department of Mental Health (DMH) housing repairs and additional housing vouchers;
- $2 million to optimize government services for hybrid work models;
- $1.8 million to support behavioral health services for Haitian and Afghan evacuees;
- $1.1 million for Safe Water Initiative Massachusetts (SWIM) grants and other summer water safety investments.

I also recommend $110 million and a related authorizing section to ratify additional collective bargaining agreements, as well as a number of technical adjustments that are neutral to the budget.

Moreover, the bill includes several policy proposals.
I am filing a section that will mandate the appointment of a guardian ad litem (GAL) in every proceeding at the Juvenile Court in which it is alleged that a child has been subjected to child abuse or neglect. The GAL will provide children in the custody of the Department of Children and Families (DCF) an independent advocate responsible for considering only the child’s best interests. Additionally, the section will set a minimum hourly wage for GALs appointed pursuant to this requirement, aligned to the hourly rate paid to CPCS attorneys in care and protection cases. I am filing an accompanying appropriation request in the amount of $50 million to support the recruitment, training, and compensation of additional GALs.

I am also including a proposal that will assist with the successful implementation of the Commonwealth’s premium pay program by exempting those payments from the Massachusetts income tax.

I am also filing a number of corrections to last year’s ARPA legislation, “An Act Relative to Immediate COVID-19 Recovery Needs,” as well as corrections to the COVID-19 supplemental budget that I signed last week. These changes will enable the proper implementation of the spending priorities set forth by the Legislature that were signed into law, placing these initiatives in the best position to assist the state’s ongoing COVID-19 recovery.

Additionally, I am filing sections that would make extensions to certain COVID-19 state of emergency provisions, such as the eviction provisions established in Chapter 257 of the Acts of 2020 that are scheduled to expire on April 1, 2022. These protections would be extended until January 1, 2023. Also included is a time-limited renewal and update of recently expired provisions that would allow the Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education to issue emergency educator licenses.

I am also filing sections that would align the filing dates of the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority’s capital budget more closely with the Commonwealth’s process and sections that would update the membership of the State Workforce Board to comply with federal requirements.

Sufficient revenues are estimated to be available to finance the appropriations proposed in this legislation. Because certain items are time sensitive, I urge you to enact this legislation promptly.

Respectfully submitted,

Charles D. Baker
Governor

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