

THE AUDITOR'S REPORT



News & Updates

from the Office of the State Auditor Suzanne M. Bump

Making government work better



Suzanne M. Bump
State Auditor

Dear Friend,

Last week, the release of the Governor's budget proposal for Fiscal Year 2019 officially kicked-off the budget process on Beacon Hill. Over the coming months, lawmakers will set their priorities for the next year and wrestle with the competing demands for limited funding.

Later this month I will testify before the Joint Committee on Ways and Means, where I will discuss with lawmakers some of our agency's successes over the past twelve months, and share some of our priorities for the next fiscal year.

I will also advocate for funding outside the Auditor's office in areas that our work has identified as underfunded. These include local funding for early voting, regional schools, and climate change planning grants.

Crafting a budget that meets the needs of Bay Staters is undoubtedly the most important job of the Legislature. As they begin their debate, I encourage you to reach out to lawmakers to let them know about the budgetary priorities that are important to you, and to follow the debate closely so you can see how your tax dollars will be used in the coming year.



Thank you,

Suzanne M. Bump
Auditor of the Commonwealth

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[Auditor Bump Certifies More Than \\$1 Million in Unfunded Mandated Early Voting Costs on Municipalities for 2016 Election](#)

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Auditor Bump talked about the work of her office to provide solutions to improve outreach to veterans in Massachusetts at the recent Veterans' Services Agent Luncheon at the State House.

OSA Focus: Keeping Our Commitment to Veterans

State Auditor Suzanne M. Bump addressed the annual Veterans' Agents Legislative Luncheon at the State House, where she spoke of her office's work to ensure the programs designed to serve veterans in the Commonwealth operate effectively.

During her remarks, she highlighted [a recent audit of the Massachusetts Department of Veterans' Services \(DVS\)](#) which found that inter-governmental silos and a lack of data created barriers that can result in veterans not receiving benefits for which they are qualified. To address these challenges, Bump recommended that DVS use data collected by other state agencies—such as the Secretary of the Commonwealth, MassHealth or the Department of Transitional Assistance—to improve its outreach to veterans to ensure they are receiving the assistance to which they are entitled.

Additionally, she highlighted audits of the state's two Soldiers' Homes in [Holyoke](#) and [Chelsea](#). These audits have helped to underscore issues related to safety, sanitation, and overtime pay. In its response to the audit, the Holyoke Soldiers' Home noted that it is implementing new procedures to better track safety inspections at the facility. And following release of the audit of the Chelsea Soldiers' Home, the Legislature passed a plan to provide \$199 million to construct a new soldier's home in the area.

We ask much of our service members and military veterans. We must make good on our promises to honor their sacrifices.



From water infrastructure and early voting to regional school district transportation, there are many areas squeezing local government budgets. As part of the OSA's efforts to strengthen our partnership with the legislature and to serve as a resource to lawmakers as they work to address policy and funding issues, OSA staff recently hosted a presentation on municipal issues and proposed budgetary remedies identified in the agency's work.

OSA's Work Makes Headlines

Fund This Mandate

In an editorial, the Boston Herald calls on the Legislature to reimburse cities and towns for mandated costs incurred to provide early voting during the 2016 election.

Legislators discuss challenges of regional schools

Regional school districts are facing many challenges, including underfunded reimbursements for transportation costs. Auditor Bump joined lawmakers and education leaders at Triton Regional High School in Byfield to discuss potential solutions to this challenge, the Newburyport Daily News reports.

2,000 Health Connector customers lack valid addresses, audit finds

The Springfield Republican highlights our audit of the Health Insurance Connector Authority, which recommended the Connector review its verification process and ensure its database is complete, accurate, and updated regularly.

Malden woman sentenced for theft of government benefits

The OSA's fraud investigation unit, the Bureau of Special Investigations, collaborated with other state and federal agencies to bring fraud charges against a Malden woman accused of misusing government benefits, the Malden Observer reports.

Accountability in Action: Acting Locally

Audits make up the majority of the work conducted by the Office of the State Auditor (OSA), but the OSA also focuses on the interactions between the state and local governments. Through its [Division of Local Mandates](#) (DLM), the OSA identifies unfunded mandates that have been passed from the state to local government, and examines issues impacting municipal budgets.

Through its reports and determinations, the OSA has identified several critical areas impacting municipalities that can be addressed immediately:

- The first is early voting. Last year, [Auditor Bump determined that parts of the early voting law constitute an unfunded mandate](#). Last month, [her office certified that municipalities spent over \\$1 million in mandated, unfunded costs to provide this service in 2016](#). Following this certification, Governor Baker included funding in his budget proposal to cover some local government costs for early voting in 2018, and [the House approved funding to reimburse communities for their 2016 spending related to this service](#). In the coming weeks, Auditor Bump and her staff will continue to work with lawmakers to provide funding for these expenses, and develop a permanent method to fund this valuable service.
- Second, a [recent report from her office reviewed regional school districts](#). The state is obligated to fully reimburse communities for regional school transportation costs; however, the report notes that these costs have not been fully reimbursed in many years. Auditor Bump has [called for full funding of these costs in the upcoming budget](#). She has also asked the legislature to fully fund the costs of homeless student transportation [based on the findings of a 2011 unfunded mandate](#). Bump's calls for funding in these areas have been echoed by the Massachusetts Municipal Association, the Massachusetts Association of School Committees, and other advocates.
- Third, [a 2017 report from Bump's office found that municipalities face significant water infrastructure needs](#). The report found that communities estimate total unmet water system spending needs of at least \$17.8 billion over the next twenty years. Additionally, the report found that most communities have not put in place a plan to ensure their water infrastructure is ready for the challenges of climate change. Auditor Bump has advocated for increased funding for climate change planning grants for cities and towns to assist in this area.
- Finally, Auditor Bump—working with Rep. Theodore Speliotis and Sen. Kathleen O'Connor-Ives—has [advocated for improved reporting by state agencies when they adopt, amend, or repeal regulations that impact municipal governments](#). Under this proposal, agencies will be required to file a municipal impact statement with Bump's office, which will be used to assist agencies in reducing negative impacts of regulations on local governments.



Auditor Bump joined lawmakers and education leaders recently in Byfield to talk about potential solutions to address falling enrollment, broad geography, and underfunded transportation reimbursements, which are straining regional school district budgets. [Watch the discussion here.](#)

For many residents of the Commonwealth, local governments are the primary face of government. Through the work of her office, Auditor Bump is working to ensure that state government is supporting municipalities.



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