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March 17, 2023

To the Honorable Senate and House of Representatives:

I am filing for your consideration a bill entitled "*An Act Making Appropriations for Fiscal Year 2023 to Provide for Supplementing Certain Existing Appropriations and for Certain Other Activities and Projects.*"

This legislation prepares the Commonwealth for the end of the COVID-19 public health emergency on May 11 and proposes to use a mix of General Fund and one-time resources to supplement funding for core programs and services, provide transitional funding for COVID-era workforce and public health programs and make other one-time investments.

The \$734 million in new appropriations recommended in this bill represent investments that build upon and align with the spending proposals and goals outlined earlier this month in my House 1 budget recommendation for Fiscal Year 2024, as well as previously filed funding requests.

Enhancing our commitment to keep Massachusetts on the cutting edge of clean technology and decarbonization and to forge new partnerships with public higher education institutions and trades to grow the clean energy industry, we are requesting an additional \$35 million for the Massachusetts Clean Energy Center. This investment would build upon our House 1 recommendation and realize the tripling of the MassCEC operating budget, consistent with the goal outlined in our Fiscal Year 2024 budget recommendation. An outside section included within would also authorize the Massachusetts Clean Energy Center to establish the Salem Offshore Wind Terminal and authorize the Salem Port Authority to acquire port land needed for the project.

This bill also recommends \$200 million for a Critical Health and Human Services and Workforce Reserve to cover projected deficiencies in Fiscal Year 2023 and expenses in early Fiscal Year 2024 for the continuation of COVID-19 response and mitigation efforts, including

temporary staffing relied upon to respond to health crises in our nursing homes, group care settings, state hospitals, and Soldiers' Homes.

This workforce funding is necessary to ensure that we continue to have adequate health professionals, including licensed practical nurses (LPNs) and certified nursing assistants (CNAs), to meet the needs of vulnerable residents under state care while we transition beyond the COVID-19 public health emergency.

A safe, efficient, and reliable MBTA is also essential to our economy and our future as a Commonwealth as we work to retain and grow jobs and allow our businesses to thrive and compete. Meeting the workforce needs of the MBTA is a critical part of delivering on that goal. While our Fiscal Year 2024 budget supports an expanded MBTA workforce, this supplemental budget would dedicate new resources to enable the MBTA to better recruit and retain employees to meet its needs. This includes money that could be used for incentives such as hiring and retention bonuses, increased pay for bus operators, and a robust marketing campaign.

Other key investments include:

- \$75 million for Chapter 766 rate relief to assist school districts in managing extraordinary increases in tuition prices for approved special education placement programs. This funding would build upon relief already proposed in House 1 and be targeted to communities most affected by unanticipated costs.
- \$60 million to support caseworkers and staff at the Department of Transitional Assistance
- \$20 million for a bridge to stabilize critical victim service programs throughout the Commonwealth and ensure continued access to trauma-informed services considering decreased federal funding through the Victims of Crime Act
- \$10 million to double the Cultural Facilities Fund for the Massachusetts Cultural Council
- \$5 million for the Martin Richard Field House
- \$3.5 million to support the redetermination process at MassHealth
- \$2 million to support a celebration of the 250th anniversary of the American Revolution
- \$100 million supplemental transfer to the pension fund

We are also proposing in this supplemental budget \$10 million to create a new LPN career ladder program. This revolving fund would support nursing facilities and home- and community-based services providers in retaining direct care staff and upskilling them to LPNs by funding no-interest loans and grants to support the cost of attending an LPN certification program, as well as living expenses while attending.

Additionally, several outside sections would make recommended adjustments to municipal finance laws and governance. These changes will, among other things, give municipalities more flexibility in how they spend anticipated opioid settlement money – making it easier for cities and towns to quickly use these resources to help address this public health crisis. They will also simplify accounting and fiscal rules regarding revolving funds, insurance proceeds and mitigation agreements.

A separate section would provide for raises for sheriffs.

The lieutenant governor and I are grateful to see both the House and Senate advance additional funding to ensure that all K-12 students in Massachusetts continue to qualify for free school meals this academic year. This policy has been vital to the success of our students and reducing stigma around poverty. This legislation requests an additional \$171 million to extend the state-funded universal free school meals pilot program for another full year under its current design and directs the Executive Office of Education to report by January 15, 2024 on options to reform, modify or extend this program in a way that promotes equity, maximizes federal revenue and improves predictability and sustainability of funding into the future.

Our administration is also excited by and supports the inclusion of funding in legislation being considered now by both the House and Senate to continue Commonwealth Cares for Children (C3) stabilization grants for child care providers through the remainder of Fiscal Year 2023, as well as money for the 114th NAACP National Convention and to restore a public awareness campaign focused on the dangers of crisis pregnancy centers and pregnancy resource centers, which seek to divert pregnant women away from the right types of care.

Finally, it has been just over three years since the novel coronavirus known as SARS-CoV-2 (“COVID-19”) caused outbreaks of COVID-19 that quickly spread globally. In response to the global pandemic, Governor Charlie Baker declared a public health emergency on March 10, 2020, and a modified public health emergency on May 28, 2021, both pursuant Section 2A of Chapter 17 of the General Laws. Consistent with Governor Baker’s declarations, the Commissioner of the Department of Public Health issued over fifty Public Health Orders which successfully limited the spread of COVID-19, maximized capacity and flexibility in the Commonwealth’s health care system, and facilitated statewide testing, treatment, and vaccination programs to combat the virus. These measures proved their value by preventing countless infections, hospitalizations, and deaths from COVID-19. Many of these measures have been extended permanently through regulatory or statutory changes, while others were rescinded or allowed to expire in line with the evolving course of the pandemic.

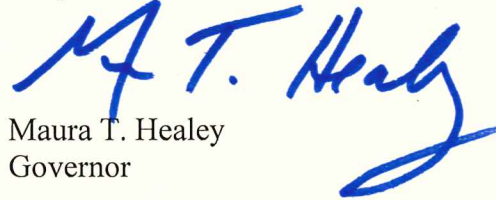
COVID-19 remains a very serious threat, especially to our most vulnerable populations, and the virus must remain a public health priority in the Commonwealth. At the same time, the widespread adoption of safe and effective vaccines and boosters, historic state and federal investments in efforts to mitigate the impacts of the virus, ready access to testing, therapeutic

advances in treatment, and prior infections and related immune responses have all contributed to making COVID-19 a more manageable illness than it once was. In consideration of these advances, I have declared that the public health emergency will end on May 11, 2023.

Of the over fifty Public Health Orders issued by the Commissioner of the Department of Public Health as part of the public health emergency, six remain in effect today. When the public health emergency ends on May 11, 2023, these six remaining Public Health Orders will end as well. After study of these remaining Public Health Orders, we are proposing a new law that will extend three of these Public Health Orders beyond the end of the public emergency, one permanently and two temporarily. The legislation would: (1) permanently extend staffing flexibilities for advanced life support ambulances; (2) temporarily extend staffing flexibilities for freestanding dialysis providers; and (3) temporarily extend flexibilities for the administration of prescription medications to clients of state agencies who reside in community settings.

The legislation and funding we propose today is critically important, and to avoid disruptions to our healthcare system, several provisions must be passed by May 11, 2023 when the public health emergency will end. Sufficient revenues are available to finance the appropriations and other proposed measures, and I urge you to consider and enact this legislation promptly.

Respectfully submitted,



Maura T. Healey
Governor