

LEGISLATIVE BULLETIN

To: All School Committee Members and Superintendents
From: Stephen J. Finnegan Esq., MASC General Counsel
Date: May 14, 2015

RE: Senate Ways And Means F.Y. 2016 Budget Recommendations

SENATE RELEASES BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS-CHAPTER 70 INCREASED

The F.Y. 2016 Senate Ways and Means Committee budget recommendations include an increase of \$111.2 million to Chapter 70 (General Aid to Education) thereby increasing funding in that account to \$4.51 billion.

The Governor's proposed budget recommended a \$105 million increase in Chapter 70 funding, which only included Foundation Aid and a \$20 per pupil increase. The House Ways and Means recommendations included an increase of \$3.5 million, therefore meeting foundation budget requirements, and providing an additional \$25 per student increase to every district. The Senate Ways and Means Committee recommends an additional increase to Chapter 70 of \$3.2 million that meets foundation budget requirements, provides \$25 per student aid and will also bring schools closer to their target spending requirements. You will find your district's Senate Ways and Means recommended Chapter 70 Aid in the Local Aid section of the budget, which may be found at the MASC website.

The House budget and the Senate Ways and Means recommendation also contain a \$34 million increase to municipal aid through Unrestricted General Government Aid, thereby bringing total funding to a total of \$980 million. The combined increases in both Chapter 70 and Municipal Aid will be of assistance to school districts in crafting reasonable budgets in an economy that continues to experience difficulties.

SPECIAL EDUCATION CIRCUIT BREAKER, REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION, CHARTER SCHOOL FUNDING

The Special Education Circuit Breaker provides state funding for the extraordinary expenses associated with certain special education expenses. The final F.Y. 2015 funding for the Circuit Breaker was \$257 million and due to mid-year cuts was further reduced by \$4 million. The House budget has proposed funding the Circuit Breaker at \$261.6 million, which represents an \$8.2 million increase over actual funding for F.Y. 2015. The Senate Ways and Means budget recommends fully funding this account at \$271.5 million. Senator Karen Spilka at the MASC Day on the Hill hinted that the special education Circuit Breaker would receive an increase and we are grateful for the substantial increase in this account.

The Governor's budget proposed that Regional School Transportation be level funded at \$51.5 million. The House budget contained a \$5 million increase for total funding of \$56.5 million. The Senate Ways and Means Committee budget proposes the same funding as the House. This account was another priority for MASC and other groups. We appreciate the increase and will work with the Senate to add further funding. We note that the final F.Y. 2015 budget funded regional transportation at \$70 million, prior to mid-year cuts.

Monies for districts sending students to charter schools have been funded by both the Governor and the House at \$76.8 million. This account in the final F.Y. 2015 budget was funded at \$80 million. The Senate Ways and Means Committee recommended

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increasing funding for this account to \$80 million. You may recall that funding for this account became a major issue last year, and we will continue to work with the Senate concerning reimbursements to school districts whose resident students attend charter schools.

MANDATED HOMELESS TRANSPORTATION FUNDED AT 50 PERCENT BY HOUSE AND SENATE

Over the past few years the issue of school districts mandated transportation costs for homeless students under the McKinney-Vento Federal Law and the Commonwealth's implementation of same, has been the subject of a determination by State Auditor Suzanne Bump through the Division of Local Mandates. The Auditor determined that the requirement for school districts to provide homeless students transportation to their previous schools was an unfunded mandate. MASC and MASS were asked by Auditor Bump to assist in the documentation to determine the cost of such transportation. The House Ways and Means Committee proposed that the Homeless Transportation account be funded with \$8.3 million, the same amount as recommended by the Governor. The Senate Ways and Means Committee recommended funding this account at \$7.3 million. MASC believes that this appropriation funds somewhat less than half of the actual cost for school districts to provide this transportation. We will continue to work on this account.

KINDERGARTEN GRANTS AND OTHER ACCOUNTS OF INTEREST

The Governor in his budget recommendations consolidated the Kindergarten Grant line item into Chapter 70. The House Ways and Means budget continued the Kindergarten Grant account as a separate line item as was preferred by education groups including MASC, and funded the program at \$18.6 million. The Senate Ways and Means budget funds this account at \$1 million; however, the Senate also spends \$12 million on new early childhood vouchers. MASC will advocate for increased funding for this account.

The Adult Basic Education account has been funded in the House budget and the Senate Ways and Means proposal at \$30.4 million.

Neither the Ways and Means nor the Governor's budget contained funding for the pothole account. This line item helps districts fund extraordinary expenses of a non-recurring nature. In F.Y. 2015 this account received a \$3.4 million appropriation. The Senate Ways and Means Committee included the pothole account with recommended funding of \$2 million.

The Senate and the House budgets contain language allowing an inflation factor to be added in special circumstances for out of district programs.

The House budget provides \$20.1 million to fund METCO; however, the Senate Ways & Means Committee has recommended funding of \$18.0 million. MASC will support additional funding for this account.

CHARTING THE COURSE

Orientation program for new and veteran school leaders.

Saturday, May 30

Plymouth North High School, Plymouth

Saturday, June 13

Turners Falls High School, Montague

Saturday, September 12

Monument Mt. High School, Great Barrington

Register online at www.masc.org