

# LEGISLATIVE bulletin

To: All School Committee Members and Superintendents  
From: Stephen J. Finnegan Esq., MASC General Counsel  
Re: House Ways & Means FY 2020 Budget Proposals  
Date: April 12, 2019

## **HOUSE WAYS & MEANS FILES FY2020 BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS: CHAPTER 70 INCREASED**

House Ways & Means proposes increasing Chapter 70, General Aid to Education, to \$5.125 billion, an increase of about \$218 million over the 2019 General Appropriation Act (GAA) and nearly \$18 million above the Governor's 2020 proposal. MASC appreciates the Ways & Means proposed appropriation; however, we will advocate for additional per pupil money to address the communities that do not greatly benefit from the Chapter 70 formula.

The Committee's proposed budget also adds almost \$30 million to the municipal account in Unrestricted General Government Aid, bringing the total UGGA funding to \$1.129 billion. This money has beneficial effects on tight local budgets and reduces the sometimes contentious relationship between schools and municipalities in the quest to adequately fund their respective budgets.

We note that through House budgetary deliberations, account recommendations may change. Also, the budget as passed by the House will go to the Senate for further deliberation. The Senate will have the advantage of drafting a budget with more monthly revenue numbers. If those numbers are positive, often the Senate will increase some of the proposed House accounts. Furthermore, representatives from both branches of the legislature, through a conference committee, arrive at the final legislative version which is then sent to the Governor. All of these steps present an opportunity for advocating for additional funding.

## **CHARTER SCHOOL REIMBURSEMENT**

The H1 recommendation sought to revamp charter school reimbursements to a three-year schedule, with 100% tuition reimbursements to districts the first year, 60% the second year and 40% the third year. Currently the reimbursements are paid over a six-year period with the first year's payment of 100% followed by five

more years with 25% paid each year. The current formula has been honored more in the breach than the observance. The House W&M budget proposes an increase of \$23 million above the 2019 GAA, thereby bringing total funding for Charter School reimbursement to \$113 million.

This account also adopts the Governor's 100%/60%/40% three-year distribution cycle. The Ways & Means budget requires that the per-pupil capital facilities amount for charter schools shall rise to \$938.00 from \$893.00. Furthermore, if the amount appropriated is insufficient to fully fund all aid statutorily required, the department shall fully fund the cost of such per-pupil capital facilities component and shall pro-rate the tuition aid amount for FY2020. This account has been significantly underfunded in prior years; therefore it is likely that the tuition proration will occur. MASC is not in favor of further exacerbating chronic underfunding of the Charter Reimbursement line item by paying the capital facilities component before the tuition reimbursement.

## **LOW-INCOME STUDENT SUPPORTS AND STUDENT WELLNESS SUPPORTS**

An account to assist low-income students has been added to the House Ways & Means budget. It is designed for school districts serving high percentages of low-income students, and not less than \$6 million of a \$16.5 million proposed appropriation shall be used to assure appropriate additional academic support for low-income students. Also, not less than \$10.5 million shall be used for a reserve to ensure equitable identification of low-income eligibility standards and to provide transitional relief to local education agencies whose Chapter 70 aid and tuition revenue has been significantly and negatively impacted by the change in the low-income enrollment measure. This account is most welcome.

## **SPECIAL EDUCATION CIRCUIT BREAKER AND REGIONAL SCHOOL TRANSPORTATION FUNDING**

The Special Education Circuit Breaker provides state funding for the extraordinary expenses associated with certain special education expenses. Circuit Breaker proposed funding in the House Ways & Means budget is \$328 million, an increase of \$5 million over H1 and \$9.5 million above the final FY2019 amount. While we recognize the effort by the Committee to fund the Circuit Breaker, MASC had proposed \$340 million to fund this account. MASC believes that this proposed appropriation is much needed and involves the most vulnerable school population. MASC will continue to monitor this account as the budget moves through the legislature.

The Ways & Means budget also proposed that Regional School Transportation be funded at almost \$74 million. This proposed funding is \$5 million more than the Governor's budget and \$9.5 million over the FY2019 budget. We appreciate the significant increase to this account, however MASC will monitor this account closely and will work with other school associations to offer amendments as appropriate. We note that this account helps to fund small and rural regional districts, many of which are struggling.

## **MANDATED HOMELESS TRANSPORTATION AND STUDENT WELLNESS ACCOUNTS FUNDED**

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 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. MASA and MASS were asked by Auditor Bump to assist in the documentation to determine the cost of such transportation and our joint survey was right on point.

House Ways & Means increases this account from the prior fiscal year by \$1 million for a total appropriation of \$10,099,500. MASC and other associations will work with the State Auditor and the Legislature to provide even greater support for this account.

The Ways & Means budget has also funded a \$2 million student wellness grant program to assist schools with addressing non-academic barriers to student success. This grant may also be expended to increase professional development opportunities for public school employees to identify students in need of mental and behavior health support. We will work with other groups to advocate for more funding for this account. MASC believes that this grant program is essential and we applaud its inclusion in the budget.

## **METCO, LITERARY GRANT PROGRAM, ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNER, ADULT BASIC EDUCATION, TARGETED ASSISTANCE, EXPANDED LEARNING TIME GRANTS AND RECOVERY HIGH SCHOOLS**

Ways and Means proposed the following amounts: METCO: \$23.6 million. Literary Grant programs: \$2.6 million. Services that improve ELL outcomes: \$2.7 million. Adult Basic Education: \$38.1 million. Targeted Assistance: \$12.4 million. Expanded Learning Time Grants: \$13.9 million. Recovery High Schools: \$2.6 million.