

Massachusetts Gov. Healey files \$734 Million supplemental budget; universal school meals, clean energy, MBTA hiring

“The Healey-Driscoll administration filed a \$734 million supplemental budget to provide additional funding for core programs and services, such as COVID-era workforce and public health programs, and to make other one-time priority investments.

The funding proposed in this bill builds on the investments made in Governor Maura Healey and Lieutenant Governor Kim Driscoll’s proposed budget recommendation for Fiscal Year 2024, with additional support for the state’s universal school meals pilot program, clean energy and technology, and additional resources for the MBTA to better recruit and retain employees.

“In our Supplemental Budget, Lieutenant Governor Driscoll and I are proposing additional investments that will move us forward on our goals of increasing affordability, competitiveness and equity in Massachusetts,” said Governor Healey. “The universal school meals program has proven to be a success in expanding access to nutritious meals for all students, and it’s essential that we keep it running and evaluate our options for the future. We also know that workforce shortages are fueling the serious service issues at the MBTA, which is why we are proposing dedicated funding for hiring and retention. And this funding will play a key role in supporting our efforts to tackle the climate crisis and make Massachusetts a global leader in the clean energy economy.”

“This supplemental budget will provide the funding needed to make sure critical programs that Massachusetts residents rely on are continued and expanded,” said Lieutenant Governor Driscoll. “We look forward to working with our partners in the Legislature to advance universal school meals, clean energy and technology, and hiring at the MBTA, as well as ensure we are adequately supporting our health care workforce as the COVID-19 public health emergency comes to an end.”

This bill fulfills Governor Healey’s commitment to triple the operating budget of the Massachusetts Clean Energy Center with an additional \$35 million for the agency to keep Massachusetts on the cutting edge of clean technology and decarbonization efforts and to forge new partnerships with public higher education institutions and trades to grow the clean energy industry. This funding would be in addition to the new money proposed for MassCEC in the administration’s House 1 budget recommendation, and MassCEC would be authorized by this bill to establish the Salem Offshore Wind Terminal to further the creation of new green jobs.

This legislation requests an additional \$171 million to extend state-funded universal free school meals through the 2023-2024 school year. It also directs the Executive Office of Education to report by early next year 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. The Healey-Driscoll Administration previously requested additional funding to continue the program through the end of the 2022-2023 school year.

The bill proposes \$20 million to enable the MBTA to better recruit and retain employees to meet its needs and deliver safe, reliable service across the system. This includes money that would be used to increase and expand hiring and retention bonuses, boost entry-level pay for bus operators, and develop a robust marketing campaign to support hiring efforts.

The bill also directs \$200 million toward 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. This includes temporary staffing relied upon to respond to health crises in our nursing homes, group care settings, state hospitals, and Soldiers' Homes.

The bill's workforce funding is necessary to ensure there are enough 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.

The Healey-Driscoll administration is also proposing \$10 million to create a new LPN career ladder program to support nursing facilities and home- and community-based services providers in their efforts to retain direct care staff and upskill them to LPNs. The program would fund no-interest loans and grants to support the cost of attending an LPN certification program, as well as living expenses while attending.

"We are pleased to have the resources necessary to continue to support critical health services for our most vulnerable residents, to build new pipelines for residents to start and advance their careers, and to make record investments in areas like clean energy that will ensure the Massachusetts economy is well positioned to grow and thrive," said Administration and Finance Secretary Matthew J. Gorzkowicz

Other key investments recommended in this bill 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
- \$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 in light of 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 for the celebration of the 250th Anniversary of the American Revolution
- \$100 million supplemental transfer to the pension fund, as agreed to with the House and Senate as part of the consensus revenue process to fully pay down pension liabilities attributable to the 2015 Early Retirement Incentive Program ahead of schedule.

Additionally, several outside sections would make recommended adjustments to municipal finance laws and governance. One of these changes would give municipalities more flexibility in how they spend opioid settlement money – making it easier for cities and towns to quickly use these resources for treatment and recovery services. They will also simplify accounting and fiscal rules regarding revolving funds, insurance proceeds and mitigation agreements. A separate section would also provide raises for sheriffs.

Finally, the administration is proposing to extend three Public Health Orders issued in connection with the COVID-19 public health emergency beyond the end of the emergency declaration on May 11. This legislation would permanently extend staffing flexibilities for advanced life support ambulances; temporarily extend staffing flexibilities for freestanding dialysis providers, and temporarily extend

flexibilities for the administration of prescription medications to clients of state agencies who reside in community settings.

The spending recommended in this bill would be covered by a mix of available General Fund revenue and one-time resources.

Read the Governor's supplemental budget filing letter [here](#) and the bill [here](#)."