

(BOSTON) – The Massachusetts Senate on Thursday voted to pass a \$29.2 billion budget for fiscal year 2012. The spending plan remains consistent with the Senate’s goal to use funding reductions, ongoing revenue initiatives and one-time revenues to find a balanced approach of cuts and revenues. The budget plan also marks the smallest year to year spending increase in the past decade.

Although consensus revenue numbers from January resulted in a 7 percent increase of \$20.52 billion, precise and educated cuts were needed to achieve the goal of a budget with no new taxes and a reduced dependence on the state’s stabilization fund and creating a spending plan based on transparency, accountability and performance.

“Preparing a budget in times of fiscal stress is never easy, but it is always important to remember that a budget is far more than mere numbers,” Senate President Pro Tem Stan Rosenberg (D-Amherst) said. “It is an expression our values. And although our improving, but still-fragile economy, prevents us from achieving all we might want, we managed to make progress in many areas and preserve the programs and services taxpayers rightly expect and deserve.”

“This budget tackles the Commonwealth’s difficult fiscal constraints head on,” said Senator Stephen M. Brewer (D-Barre), Chairman of the Senate Committee on Ways and Means. “Simply put, the money is not there. We were forced to make painful reductions but have remained dedicated to preserving services for the neediest citizens in this state. While economic indicators point to Massachusetts coming out of this recession, we must move forward with cautious spending initiatives to maintain our fiscal health and preserve economic growth.”

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By utilizing program integrity initiatives to identify programs where funding will be best utilized and maximum efficiencies can be achieved, the Senate targeted programs aimed to provide financial assistance to education initiatives, municipalities and families.

In an effort to provide relief to schools across the Commonwealth, the Senate voted to boost its Special Education Circuit Breaker funding by \$11 million, increasing the reimbursement amount for school districts for the necessary cost of educating children with special needs. Members also unanimously approved an increase of \$3 million for Regional School Transportation from the House budget and FY11 spending.

Other education initiatives approved on the floor of the Senate include a \$400,000 increase for expanding Advanced Placement (AP) programs and \$500,000 for new pipeline funding for programs that support careers in fields related to science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM).

Maintaining a focus on residents in need, the Senate increased its clothing allowance to families with dependent children from \$40 to \$75. The Women, Infants and Children (WIC) Nutrition Program - which provides supplemental foods, health care referrals, and nutrition education for low-income pregnant, postpartum women, and to infants and children up to age 5 who are found to be at nutritional risk – was increased by \$1 million.

The Senate approved reforms to the State's Emergency Assistance Program, a transitional program that provides temporary housing for families, teens and adult individuals who find themselves homeless. Changes move from a system that provides temporary housing to a system that encourages permanent housing by reducing dependence on hotels and increasing consistent stable housing.

Although local aid numbers were reduced from last year, the final Senate budget does provide relief to municipalities, including a \$2 million increase for the PILOT program for reimbursements to cities and towns in lieu of taxes on state-owned land, which represents a \$2 million increase above the previous fiscal year. Additionally, it includes a plan that provides \$750 million in savings through rate changes and procurement reforms in Medicaid.

The Senates proposes a plan to reform municipal health insurance to give cities and towns the authority to more easily transfer subscribers to the Group Insurance Commission (GIC) or implement health plan features that are tied to what is offered by the GIC. The plan could provide millions in savings, while providing municipal employees and retirees a strong voice without a veto.

Currently, the Massachusetts unemployment rate is steadily declining. Moving forward, the Senate is taking measures to ensure that the economy maintains its upward trajectory. These include \$3 million to restore the Youth-At-Risk Summer Jobs account targeted at reducing juvenile delinquency in high risk areas by developing and implementing year-round employment programs for at risk youth and increased funding for economic development grants.

An extension of the sunset clause for active duty military personnel who are also public employees was adopted by a unanimous vote, allowing service members to receive differential pay if their base pay military salary is less than their base pay public service salary. The current law is set to expire on September 11, 2011. That date is extended to September 11, 2014.

The Senate also adopted significant changes to the Commonwealth's indigent defender program and the Massachusetts Committee for Public Counsel Services. Reforms call for a split of 30 percent public and 70 percent private defenders from the current 10 percent/90 percent split and requires the plan to be implemented in 1 year. The Senate also proposes a \$50 increase in the indigent counsel fee.

Funding was increased by \$1 million for the Shannon Grant program, named for former Senator Charles E. Shannon, Jr., which provides resources to communities with a demonstrated gang and youth violence problem. Bringing the total to \$5.5 million, this targeted funding will offer lasting benefits for communities by encompassing prevention, intervention, and suppression programs utilizing law enforcement, community-based organizations and government agencies.

“I congratulate Chairman Brewer’s leadership in crafting the Senate’s budget that closes a \$1.9 billion budget gap through a combination of painstaking cuts and ongoing reform initiatives”, said Senator Steven A. Baddour (D-Methuen), Vice-Chairman of the Senate Committee on Ways and Means. “Despite the absence of federal stimulus funds and other one-time revenue sources, the Senate has put forth a balanced budget that addresses the important policy issues that affect our state: creating jobs, growing the economy, and balancing the state budget in a fiscally responsible manner”.

The Senate increased spending by \$63 million dollars as a result of expected increased departmental and federal revenues. The budget will now go to a conference committee where three members from the Senate and three members from the House of Representatives will negotiate a compromise spending plan to be sent to the Governor to be signed into law.

### **Amendments**

Rosenberg-sponsored amendments that passed:

- Optional Retirement Program-corrects a technical issue in the language for higher education employees, as well as allowing them to enroll online in the ORP.
- Virtual Schools Payment Change- includes language to ensure the innovation schools are paid the money owed to them by sending communities in a timely manner.
- DEP Transfer Stations- The amendment repeals what was done in last year’s budget. Last year, the Department was removed from the permitting process, placing the responsibility completely on local boards of health, which turned out to be a great management and financial burden on the towns. This re-instates DEP in the process, returning to the former process.
- Tuition Retention- By local option, this allows state colleges and universities to retain all in state tuition. Last year the Legislature passed language that allowed them retain all out of state tuition. This allows them to retain all of their tuition.
- MassDOT Transfer- Added \$5 million to the line item, which among other things funds the RTAS

Rosenberg co-sponsored amendments that passed:

- Office of the Child Advocate-passed language that allows the Child Advocate to access the electronic records of DCF. The Child Advocate is already allowed access to this information, but

has to go through the Dept to access it. This allows the Child Advocate to investigate cases more quickly.

- Northampton Land- Approved language that gives the 6 acres at 78 Pomeroy Lane to the city of Northampton
- Mass Cultural Council- added 1 million to the line item, bringing it up to \$5.4 million. It's the same funding the House and Governor approved.
- Regional School Transportation- added \$3 million to the line item, making it \$3 million more than the House and Governor, and \$3 million over level funding.
- Foster Care Clothing Allowance- restored part of the foster care clothing allowance that was cut.