

**Press Release
From the Office of
State Representative
Gale D. Candaras**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 2, 2006

**CONTACT: Darlotte J. Gay
413-599-4785
617-722-2520
dgay@galecandaras.org**

**HOUSE PASSES FY'07 BUDGET WITH RECORD AMOUNTS OF LOCAL AID,
CH. 70 FUNDING**

WILBRAHAM, MA -- Representative Gale D. Candaras (D-Wilbraham) announced today that the House of Representatives passed a \$25.46 billion budget for the fiscal year beginning July 1, 2006. The spending plan directs record amounts of local aid and Chapter 70 education funding to the Commonwealth's 351 cities and towns.

“Without question, the two centerpieces of the House's budget are local aid and Chapter 70 funding,” said Candaras. “We understand the difficult challenges facing cities and towns and are committed to helping our partners in local government provide the essential services our citizens depend on.”

The Legislature was forced to divert Lottery aid—one form of local aid traditionally directed to municipalities—to the state's general fund during the most recent recession. As a result, cities and towns made cuts to local education, public safety and transportation services and raised property taxes to balance local budgets. By ending this diversion, the House will send \$920 million to cities and towns, an historic amount that exceeds pre-recessionary spending levels.

“The returns on our investments in local aid and Chapter 70 are immeasurable,” Candaras said. “First rate schools and quality municipal services make Massachusetts an ideal place to live, work and raise a family. The House budget directs significant resources to these accounts and goes a long way toward alleviating pressures on local budgets across the state.”

Local school districts sustained substantial cuts in state funding at the height of the economic downturn in 2003. The \$173 million increase in Chapter 70 education funding approved by the House represents a nearly \$10 million increase over the Governor's budget. Additionally, the House's spending plan begins to address inequities in the formula used to determine Chapter 70 distribution levels and brings total FY'07 education spending to \$3.4 billion.

Additional highlights of the House budget include:

Local Aid

- Provided an additional \$158 million in Lottery distribution, which represents 100% of Lottery revenues now returned to cities and towns as a result of the removal of the “Lottery cap;”

- Provided an increase of \$173 million in Chapter 70 school aid distribution and begins to address issues of equity in the funding formula;
- Provided \$25 million for the Sewer Rate Relief fund to help control the water and sewer bills of ratepayers throughout the Commonwealth;
- Provided \$21.2 million for Community Policing grants to cities and towns;
- Level funded the Additional Assistance line item;
- Increased to \$22 million Payment in Lieu of Taxes (“PILOT”) payments;
- Provided an increase of \$10 million for regional school transportation reimbursements.

Education

- Provided an increase of \$27.9 million for the University of Massachusetts (to be distributed to all five campuses) and a \$34.7 million increase for state and community colleges to decrease the so-called “funding gap” and to account for collective bargaining agreements;
- Provided an increase of \$16.7 million for child care vouchers to decrease the waiting list;
- Provided an increase of \$2 million for kindergarten expansion grants;
- Allocated \$5 million for extended learning time grants to allow for the implementation of planning grants created in FY06;
- Created new \$5 million line item for pilot implementation grants to provide access to pre-kindergarten education and related services for three and four year old children in the Commonwealth;
- Provided a \$1 million increase for Head Start programs;
- Provide a \$2 million increase for the Mass. Grant scholarship program;
- Provided a \$2 million increase for scholarships for early educators;
- Provided \$10 million for early education rate increase;
- Provided \$1.7 million increase for METCO program;
- Provided \$1 million for the leadership advancement program to focus on the training of principals and superintendents in underperforming schools;
- Provided an increase of \$250,000 for state aid to municipal libraries and a \$500,000 increase for state aid to regional libraries.

Health and Human Services

- Increased funding for the purchase of service reserve by \$8 million. This reserve dedicates \$28 million to enhance the salaries of hard-working individuals who provide direct care services to the most needy throughout the Commonwealth;

- Created a new Step Down Recovery Pilot program to assist individuals in substance abuse treatment on the path to a more complete and permanent recovery;
- Included \$57 million in funding for the Prescription Advantage program to provide financial assistance for premiums, co-pays, and gaps in coverage in Medicare Part D;
- Added \$3.1 million for a Senior Pharmacy open enrollment and earmarked \$600,000 for senior pharmacy outreach;
- Provided an additional \$1 million to the Autism Division of the Department of Mental Retardation (DMR) established last year;
- Provided an additional \$1 million to support expected growth in DMR's 2007 "Turning 22" class;
- Provided an increase of \$830,000 for the Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE) program;
- Increased funding for child and adolescent mental health services by \$1.1 million;
- Provided an increase of \$1.6 million for the Early Intervention program to support caseload and cost increases;
- Included \$4.1 million for MassHealth Breast and Cervical Cancer program which will serve 445 MassHealth clients needing breast and cervical cancer services;
- Included a funding increase of \$550,000 for Councils on Aging grants.

Housing and Homelessness

- Provided an additional \$1.05 million for the Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program (MRVP) to provide additional vouchers to eligible families and individuals;
- Provided an additional \$500,000 for the Alternative Voucher Housing program to provide additional vouchers to non-elderly persons with disabilities and/or handicaps;
- Provided an additional \$200,000 for the Housing Services Program, which provides support services and activities to prevent at-risk families from becoming homeless;
- Provided an additional \$500,000 for the Department of Mental Health (DMH) Rental Subsidy Program.

Public Safety

- Created a new \$1 million re-entry initiative program intended to reduce inmate recidivism rates at the Department of Corrections;
- Provided \$2.5 million for a Firefighting Equipment Grant Program;

- Provided \$200,000 for upgrades at the sex offender registry board to support user-friendly, up-to-date applications to make identifying and tracking sex offenders easier;
- Provided \$16.2 million to continue upgrades at the state police crime lab in order to ensure quality forensic services for the law enforcement agencies and district attorneys of the Commonwealth are available and provided \$1.1 million for improvements to the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner.