

Massachusetts House Minority Leader

**Bradley H. Jones, Jr.**

Proudly Representing the 20th Middlesex District



## What's Going On At The State House?

April 2010

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**Dear Friends,**

Welcome to the April edition of "What's Going on at the State House," an e-mail newsletter I write to stay in touch with you and keep you posted on what I'm working on in the Legislature and in the 20th Middlesex District.

I want to start out this update by apologizing for the tardiness of this month's edition. April was quite the busy month on Beacon Hill as the House considered a number of controversial and important pieces of legislation, including the FY11 House budget.

In addition to passing the budget, the Massachusetts House of Representatives also passed a municipal relief bill and an expanded gaming bill. While I did not support the FY11 House budget, I did cast my vote in favor of the other two pieces of legislation.

As always, if you have something on your mind that you would like to share, please contact me at my State House office or send me an e-mail. I look forward to hearing from you.

All the best,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Brad".

### Poll Question

Do you support a proposal that would require the verification of legal residency in order to receive non-emergency public services?

[YES](#)

[NO](#)

*Results will be available in the next issue.*

### Results from last month's poll question

Do you support expanded gaming in the Commonwealth?

**YES 70%**

**NO 30%**

## Jones votes against House FY11 budget

In my 16 years as a State Representative, I have never seen a poorer budget process. However, that is not the main reason I voted against this budget. I could not in good conscience vote in favor of the FY11 House budget as I feel the cut to local aid will have a devastating and lasting effect on cities and towns across the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

My Republican colleagues and I proposed a number of costs-saving measures that if adopted would have allowed the Legislature to level fund local aid and Chapter 70 without affecting the bottom line. The amendments we offered would have amounted to well over \$300 million dollars in savings. Level funding local aid to what the Governor had proposed would have cost \$234 million. As a former local official, I understand the importance of being able to provide services on a local level. Unfortunately, local aid has been slashed to the point that towns and cities have been left crippled.

Additionally, I offered a whole host of amendments that would not only implement real reform but would also save the Commonwealth hundreds of millions of dollars. For example, moving MassHealth recipients to a managed care program could save the state over \$100 million annually. That's one innovative proposal that could generate big savings. It, like many others, was unfortunately rejected.

## Jones scores bipartisan victory

At the end of April, the Massachusetts House of Representatives debated a bill aimed at providing relief to municipalities across the Commonwealth. I am pleased to announce that the amendment I offered that would protect taxpayers from yet another tax increase was adopted.

As you may recall, the House Ways and Means Committee proposed allowing municipalities to raise property taxes outside of the constraints of the so-called "proposition 2½ limits" without a local vote.

I filed an amendment to the so-called Municipal Relief Bill striking out this language.

Since the Patrick-Murray Administration assumed office in 2007, the average property tax bill has increased by 18%; from \$3,962 in FY07 to the current \$4,671. Taxpayers can't afford to foot the bill for the continued fiscal mismanagement on Beacon Hill. By adopting this amendment, the House took a significant step to protect the wallets of taxpayers and Proposition 2 ½, which passed 30 years ago.

If this bill passed with the original language, it would cost Massachusetts taxpayers at least \$165 million in increased property taxes.

The so-called Municipal Relief Bill establishes a statewide mutual aid agreement allowing mutual aid assistance – such as fire services, law enforcement and emergency medical services – during a public safety incident. The bill also creates a statewide public works mutual aid agreement for the sharing of public works resources across jurisdictional lines during public works incidents.

The bill allows pension systems, with the exception of the State Employees Retirement System and the Teachers' Retirement System, to extend their funding schedule to 2040.

In an effort to control costs, the bill lets school districts reimburse parents of disabled children who drive their children to private day programs outside the municipality in which they live rather than allow only the school district to provide such transportation.

The package also allows any accepting municipality to establish an early retirement program for its employees. Municipalities would be restricted when filling vacancies created by early retirements and could pay only a fraction of the participants' total annual salary in upcoming fiscal years.

The relief package includes a local option tax amnesty program which allows cities and towns to waive portions of interest and penalties due on unpaid taxes as long as the taxpayer pays the principal amount and is not subject to criminal investigation for failure to pay taxes.

### **House Passes Expanded Gaming Legislation**

Along with passing the House budget in April, the House also took up a bill that would expand gaming in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. The way the bill is drafted would create jobs and stimulate economic growth throughout the Bay State.

The legislation, which authorizes two resort casinos and up to 750 slots at each of the state's four racetracks, passed with bipartisan support by a veto-proof margin of 120-37. The bill will create an estimated 15,000 jobs in the Commonwealth, deliver \$260 million in up-front licensing fees to the state and bring an estimated \$300 – 500 million in annual tax revenue.

After a thorough and lengthy debate in the Massachusetts House of Representatives, expanded gaming in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts is now one step closer to a reality. While I am pleased with the show of bipartisanship, I am particularly happy that our cities and towns across the state will be the recipients of a new local aid revenue stream.

### **Anti-Bullying Bill Signed into Law**

In a decisive move to help schools address bullying, the Massachusetts House of Representatives approved comprehensive legislation prohibiting bullying and cyber-bullying, directing schools to implement bullying prevention and

intervention plans, and requiring school staff to report incidents of bullying.

The bill, which Governor Patrick recently signed into law, requires schools to include bullying prevention in their curriculum and to develop and implement plans to address bullying. The bill prohibits bullying on school grounds, school busses, at school-sponsored activities, and through the use of electronic communications.

In an effort to control costs for schools, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education is required to identify low cost and free options for professional development for school staff. The Department is also required to develop a model bullying prevention and intervention plan schools can use in developing their own plans.

In recognition of the role that parents have in preventing and stopping bullying, the bill requires principals to notify parents of both the victim and perpetrator when bullying has occurred. The bill also involves parents by requiring that schools consult parents in the development of their anti-bullying plans and that schools offer information to parents on bullying prevention.

In addition, children on the Autism spectrum and children who are vulnerable to bullying because of a disability must have provisions in their Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) to ensure they obtain the skills to avoid and respond to bullying.

The bill prohibits retaliation against a person who reports bullying provides information during an investigation of bullying, or who is a witness to or has reliable information about bullying.

### **Zoning Incentive Payment Awarded to Reading**

In April, the Department of Housing and Community Development awarded the Town of Reading a \$350,000 Zoning Incentive Payment from the Smart Growth Housing Trust Fund.

Additionally, the Town of Reading's request for a Downtown Smart Growth District has been approved and will allow for the construction of 256 Incentive Units.

The Smart Growth Zoning Overlay District Act was signed into law in 2004. Its goal is to encourage communities to create dense residential or mixed-use smart growth zoning districts, including a high percentage of affordable housing units, to be located near transit stations, in areas of concentrated development such as existing city and town centers, and in other highly suitable locations.

It's great to see money going directly to cities and towns across the Commonwealth. I am pleased the Town of Reading is receiving this money and I am certain this incentive payment will help generate new, affordable housing for residents in the area.

