

SENATE No. 1



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**Governor Maura T. Healey
State of the Commonwealth Address
January 16, 2025**

Good evening, Massachusetts! Speaker Mariano, President Spilka, Leader Jones, Leader Tarr, members of the Legislature; Secretary Galvin; Attorney General Campbell; Treasurer Goldberg; Auditor DiZoglio; Members of the judiciary and Governor’s Council; Members of Congress; former elected officials; Mayors and local officials; business and labor leaders; clergy and guests; To everyone in this Chamber and all those at home: Thank you for the privilege of serving as your governor.

Joanna, and our families, thank you for your love and support. Lieutenant Governor, Kim, thank you for always keeping us fired up and focused on our local communities. You give 110% and this state couldn’t have a better leader. Members of our cabinet and executive staff: Team Massachusetts all the way! Let me see those bracelets! To state employees: Thank you for the work you do to keep Massachusetts strong. To our service members, veterans and Gold Star Families: everything we have, we owe to you.

250 years ago this April, on a common in Lexington and a bridge in Concord, the farmers, tradesmen and shopkeepers of the Massachusetts Militia took a stand. They risked everything for the right to self-government and they started the Revolution that gave us our country. This is our legacy, Massachusetts, and it’s more than history. It’s who we are.

The militia that fought at Lexington and Concord, guess what? It never disbanded.

It became part of the United States Army and defended freedom at every moment in our history. Today it's known as the 181st Infantry Regiment, and its home is in the Massachusetts National Guard. For most of last year, the 1-8-1 was deployed to Iraq, defending peace in one of the most dangerous regions of the world. A few weeks ago, Joanna and I went to Hanscom Air Force Base to thank those soldiers as they returned home. They stepped off the plane in their camo and boots, straight into freezing wind and driving snow. But they were undaunted, and smiling, because they knew they would soon see their families. Nine soldiers received Combat Badges in this deployment, and some of them are here tonight. Let's give them a big welcome home. Thank you for serving our country and making us proud.

I am moved beyond words by the grit, drive and sheer goodness of the people of Massachusetts. I see it in our citizen soldiers. It's in the firefighters who spent weeks battling wildfires last fall. When we see what firefighters are doing in Southern California right now, and what our own firefighters and first responders do every day, we are so grateful. And welcome to International Firefighters President, and Boston's own, Ed Kelly.

I see it in the teachers and schools where we pioneered public education. And I see it in breakthroughs by our scientists and innovators. Did you know, in 2024, one-third of all the Nobel Prizes were won by people in Massachusetts? That's not unusual for our state. Two M.I.T. economists won for showing that democracy makes economies stronger. And with us tonight are Victor Ambros of UMass Chan Medical School and Gary Ruvkun of Mass. General Hospital and Harvard. They won the Nobel for medicine. You, and they, will be glad to know that we passed our Economic Development bill and reinvested in Life Sciences, ensuring that the cures, technologies, and great jobs of the future will continue to be created right here in Massachusetts. Please join me in congratulating our Nobel winners.

We tackle hard problems in Massachusetts. Coach Joe Mazzulla said it well, he's an innovator in a field that's close to my heart. He said "everybody notices the easy things. Can you fight to notice the hard things? That's where winning is." We know a thing or two about winning in Massachusetts. Last year the Boston Renegades won the national women's football title. The Fleet were national finalists in women's hockey. It's the 100th anniversary of the Bruins! And the Celtics hung Banner 18! ... Yeah, Max! And, over 40 Massachusetts athletes represented America at the Olympic and Paralympic Games in Paris. With us tonight are medalist Clark Dean and Femita Ayanbeku of Randolph. Femita is a world-class paralympic sprinter and a mom who gave birth just 8 months before racing in Paris. She made the finals in the 100 meters and did us proud. Let's give these champions a hand.

Two years ago, we promised to lead in a way worthy of this state's proud history and incredible people. To protect and strengthen the things we love. And to take on the things that make life too hard, for too many: like high costs that hold us back, and aging infrastructure that slows us down. These problems had been building up for years. Maybe there were other priorities. Maybe the politics were hard. But people were hurting. Too many were leaving. We

refused to kick the can down the road any longer. Why? Because, if our soldiers can spend a year away from their families, firefighters can toil for days on end in burning woods, entrepreneurs can pour their heart and soul into a business... then government can do our job and deliver the results that you pay for and you deserve.

And that's what we've done. Working with everyone in this Chamber and across our state, we just completed one of the most productive legislative sessions in Massachusetts history. Tax cuts, housing, economic development, healthcare, climate, veterans!

Mr. Speaker, Senate President, it's not lost on me, this could not have happened without your leadership. Thanks for staying with it and getting so much done. We focused on the things that people care about. People want a more affordable state. So, we delivered the first tax cut in 20 years! We gave seniors back an extra \$1000. We're giving families over \$400 for each child. We now have the most generous child tax credit in the country: free breakfast and lunch in school and no-cost community college.

People also need childcare. After the pandemic, childcare across the country was collapsing and childcare centers were closing. So, we got to work, because our working parents depend on it. We were the only state to fully replace federal support that went away, with a \$1.5 billion investment. We not only saved our system, but affordable childcare is growing in Massachusetts. Today 36,000 more children are getting care; and their parents can go to work and support their families.

People want to be able to afford a home. So, we passed the Affordable Homes Act to create tens of thousands of affordable homes and new homeowners. We already increased production in state programs by 50%, adding 4,000 homes and helping 2,400 first-time homeowners last year alone.

People need transportation and public transit they can rely on. When we took office, trains were barely moving! So, we hired an experienced General Manager for the MBTA in Phil Eng, along with 1,500 new workers. Phil set a goal of fixing the tracks by the end of 2024 ... a bold promise, given the T's history. But he and his team beat their deadline. And for the first time in over 20 years, the T is full speed, with no more slow zones, giving you time back in your life. Congratulations Phil! In Phil we Trust! We also made regional bus systems from the Berkshires to Cape Ann fare-free. And for the first time in 70 years, this spring we will start South Coast Rail Commuter service to Taunton, Fall River and New Bedford.

People want safe, modern infrastructure. So, I promised we'd go hard after every federal dollar. And in two years, we brought home more than \$9 billion – for roads and bridges, solar power, high-speed internet, and more. I want to thank our federal delegation for all their help. In transportation dollars alone, we went from 34th place to 7th nationwide, jumping ahead of larger states like Florida, Ohio and North Carolina. We won funding to take the next steps forward on

West-East Rail. And we got the biggest bridge grant ever given to a state, for the Cape Cod Bridges.

We also took on tough, unexpected problems, including a massive influx into the emergency shelter system due to a failure of federal border control, and a nationwide housing crisis. I want to be absolutely clear: We are dramatically reducing costs; and we have, and will, prioritize Massachusetts families. In 2025 we'll get families out of hotels for good. We're going to keep working with the Legislature to reform this system. Massachusetts taxpayers should not, and cannot, continue to foot the cost. The federal government needs to fix this at the source, by passing a border security bill. They need to deport violent criminals. And immigrant families who have lived here, have children here, have jobs and pay taxes here, need and deserve a path forward. Congress and the new federal Administration must act without delay.

Whatever else is happening, we will always put our veterans first. We passed the HERO Act, the biggest veterans' legislation in state history, to expand health benefits, job opportunities and much more. We're ending veteran homelessness once and for all, because no one who served our country should ever be left behind in their time of need. And we built brand-new, world-class facilities at the veterans' homes in Chelsea and Holyoke. When I visit the Holyoke Veterans Home, I love seeing my friend Rose Roy. Rose is 102 years old and a veteran of World War II. The staff take care of her like family. And she leads us in the Pledge of Allegiance when we visit. Rose, I know you are watching tonight with your friends in the Holyoke Home. Thank you for your service. Let's show Rose and all our veterans how grateful we are.

In Massachusetts we support our military. It's why we were proud to win a fleet of brand-new, F-35 Fighter Jets at Barnes Air Base in Westfield. Colonel Dave Halasi-Kun is here from Barnes, along with leaders from military bases across our state. People want their government to work hard for them, and that's what we've done. Let me give you an example. We found out there was a law threatening to take licenses away from hundreds of commercial drivers. So, we fixed it, and they're keeping their licenses and their jobs.

International Teamsters President Sean O'Brien is here; he knows what a good trucking job means to a middle-class family, and so do we.

And here's something else that means a lot to people. We made history by pardoning hundreds of thousands of people for misdemeanor marijuana convictions going back decades. It was the right thing to do. In Massachusetts, our greatest resource is our people. When we took office, too many were leaving for other states. Now, that trend is changing. Each year that we've been in office, fewer people have left. Last year, we had the biggest population increase since 1964. That's a 60-year high!

When we deliver results, and people are free to chase their dreams, there is no limit to how strong we can be. It's why we are ranked #1 for education, #1 for innovation, and #1 for healthcare. We were named the best state for women, best state to have a baby, and best state to

raise a family. We are ranked the most environmentally friendly state, and the safest state as well. Our economy has continued to grow and add good jobs. Unemployment is low, and median household income is the highest in the nation. We have an excellent bond rating, and our Rainy-Day Fund is at record levels. And we can say, with pride and confidence: the state of our Commonwealth is strong.

This year, we'll work together to implement the historic legislation we passed last year. And we'll stay focused on the things that matter to you. We'll take new steps forward: to fix transportation, make homes more affordable, invest in education, and grow our economy. State revenues are growing. But the cost of providing services has gone up; and federal pandemic relief is long gone. So, we will continue to control spending and live within our means just as every family and business is doing. So, I promise: the budget I submit next week will prioritize efficiency, action and impact. We need every dollar to make a difference. I want to make things move and go in our state.

Let's start with transportation, because we have an opportunity to do something really special this year. When we took office two years ago, everyone was frustrated. And rightly so. Bridges were in rough shape, forcing long detours. Too many streets were filled with potholes and cracked sidewalks. Broken dams and busted culverts left towns vulnerable to flooding. What's worse, there was no plan to dig out, let alone to do better. That's no way to run a transportation system for a modern economy. It wasn't going to keep us competitive. And most important: it wasn't respectful to people who are trying to get to work and school and just simply live their lives. So, we were determined to do things differently, and we did. We got big projects moving with federal funding. We got more help to cities and towns to fix those streets and sidewalks. And we got the T moving. There's more that needs to be done. But what we can say now – to drivers, riders, and taxpayers – is that the money you invest will get you results.

Now, we can start building the system you deserve. Here's how we'll do it. Not with new taxes, but with smart, forward-thinking management. Our plan is to invest \$8 billion over the next 10 years to make transportation better in every corner of our state. We'll put the entire system on stable financial footing, something we haven't had for decades. When we do this, you'll see the results. You'll see bridges fully open again, like the I-391 viaduct in Chicopee. You'll see smaller, local bridges finally fixed too, like Commercial Street in East Weymouth. You'll see more funding in your town's budget to fix roads and sidewalks. Finally, we're going to close the T's budget gap so Phil and his team can keep cookin'. You'll see more frequent trains and buses; major upgrades at stations like Ruggles in Roxbury; and new platforms across the Commuter Rail from Beverly Depot to West Medford to Franklin and beyond. Bottom line, you'll wait less, and you'll move faster. And we'll be a state where everybody gets where they need to go safely, affordably, sustainably and on time.

Let me tell you what we are going to do about housing. For decades, we didn't build enough homes in this state. We're paying the price for that, now. There's not enough housing

and it's too expensive. But we're changing that. This year, with the Affordable Homes Act in place, we're going to get shovels in the ground and people in homes. And we're going to do it together. So far, 116 towns have said "Yes" to more homes near transit through the MBTA Communities Law. That means thousands of new homes are in the pipeline. So, let's keep the momentum going. If we want our kids to stay here, if we want families to put down roots, if we want seniors to be able to live in the towns they love, if we want companies to stay and grow here, we need more homes. And we're going to build them.

I've talked about homeownership. I also want to speak to all the renters out there. Whenever you move, I know there's a huge cost. First month, last month, security deposit, I rented for many years, I know it adds up. And with today's rents, it's so much more. And too often, there's another cost tacked on: a broker's fee, for a service you didn't even ask for. That's not right. The average renter has to pay 10 grand just to get a foot in the door. That's money you could be saving for a downpayment on a house. If you rent, you should not be forced to pay a broker's fee. That is why I'm calling to abolish tenant broker fees in Massachusetts. It's the right thing to do.

We have the best schools in the country. It's a core value, and it's also our competitive edge. So, I am committed, and we all must be committed, to excellence for every student. We are Number One for education and we're going to stay that way. The voters decided in November that the MCAS graduation requirement is not the way forward. I respect that decision. But it creates for all of us a responsibility, to make sure every student graduates ready to succeed. We need a high, statewide standard. Students, families, and employers need to know what a diploma represents. And without that baseline, it's always the most vulnerable students who don't get what they need. For that reason: I am directing a Statewide Graduation Requirement Council that will include teachers, colleges, employers and students to develop recommendations for a permanent, high standard. We'll evolve to a new Massachusetts model for high school excellence that best serves our children. And we'll match high standards with great opportunities – like the Early College and job training programs that give students a leg up on their next step.

Let me tell you about a young man named Haris. Haris went to Burlington High School, where he didn't take just traditional courses. He also did the Computer Science career pathway. It's one of the programs we've brought to 100 high schools across the state, with employer partners in fields from biotechnology to clean energy. As a senior, Haris did a capstone project with an industry mentor: he built an app for a local sneaker store called Courtside Kicks. Now he's a freshman at UMass Lowell doing a degree in software engineering and managing the sneaker store part-time. He's working hard and building a great experience. And because of our investments, so are thousands of students in pathway programs across Massachusetts. Keep it up, Haris!

I talk about students who are thriving, and that's what we want for all our young people. So, let's also talk about students who are having a hard time. Students are struggling with

pressures and changes we never had to deal with. And when our sons and daughters are in crisis, they need help right away. No one, especially a child, should sit for hours or days in an Emergency Room, waiting for mental health care. This is why we opened 31 Community Behavioral Health Centers across the state. They are there, providing 24-hour, dedicated crisis care. They've made a difference, helping more than 30,000 young people so far, and we'll keep supporting their work. But we must do more. We also need more resources in schools, to meet students where they are. So, our budget will fund behavioral health support in schools across our state. I've met with young people who got the help they needed in their high schools. What they shared was powerful, and it's what I want for every young person: understanding and care, when and where they need it. And we are going to make sure that happens.

Here's another opportunity. Rep. Carol Doherty of Taunton is a longtime educator.

This year she, with Sen. Jake Oliveira, will reintroduce legislation to make classes in American Sign Language eligible for course credit. ASL is used by millions of Americans, and interpreters play a critical role in our workforce. So, we're going to get this done.

Carol, I know you couldn't be here tonight, but I wanted to say thank you.

Massachusetts is America's healthcare leader. First in quality. First in coverage. And #1 for having the healthiest people. We are #1 because we have the best and hardest-working nurses, doctors and healthcare professionals in the world. And we lead because we don't accept the status quo. We keep pushing forward. Last year, we got 60,000 people affordable healthcare coverage. Because of the steps we took, people in Massachusetts have access to breast cancer screenings, midwives, doulas, birthing centers, recovery coaches and more, because insurance is now going to cover it. I also know many of you have medicines you need to take for diabetes, asthma and heart conditions. But you go to the pharmacy stressed out about whether you can afford to fill those prescriptions. Now we've taken that stress away. Last week, I signed a law that says you're not going to pay more than \$25 a month for insulin, your inhaler, and so much more.

We also got a terrible company, Steward, out of Massachusetts and saved 6 hospitals and 13,000 jobs thanks to the tireless work of so many, including our Health & Human Services Secretary Kate Walsh. We still have so much work to do. Patients are paying more than ever for premiums and out-of-pocket costs. Often, it's hard just to get an appointment. It's really frustrating. It's also unacceptable. It has to change. So, here's what we're going to do. I am directing my Administration to shift healthcare resources to the front lines. And by that, I mean primary care. We'll drive career training pipelines to grow the workforce. I want a whole army of primary care providers out there, so when you call for an appointment, you'll get one. You'll get the affordable care you need, where and when you need it.

Our leadership has never been more important, including our unshakeable commitment to reproductive healthcare, all who need it, and all who provide it. Fixing transportation, housing,

education, and healthcare, all of these things help make life better. They also make our economy more competitive and our businesses stronger. That's important. From our Main Street mom-and-pops to our global companies, businesses provide jobs and support communities. We have to support them, in every sector and corner of our state. That's what we're doing.

I think about how hard our small businesses are working. Meet Liz and Nate L'Etoile. They are the founders of Four Star Farms in Northfield, where they grow hops. They're here with Chris Sellers, who runs a brewery right on the farm. Remember, Massachusetts is where the craft beer revolution started. But yet, until now, breweries like theirs were barred by state law from selling beer at local farmers' markets! That made no sense, so we fixed it. And we are grateful to Four Star and all the small businesses that support our communities.

When we see anything that doesn't make sense, we're going to work to fix it.

In fact, I am directing our Economic team to review all business and licensing regulations in the first 3 months of this year, with the goal of cutting red tape. I want it cheaper and faster for you to do business in Massachusetts. When we back our businesses, they grow and thrive.

This year, global life science leaders are investing in new headquarters, labs and manufacturing plants, not only in Greater Boston but in Worcester and across the state. Startups are growing here that will help us decarbonize and bring more energy to Massachusetts. Now they are able to scale up statewide, with support from our new Climate Tech initiative.

And we're going big in Artificial Intelligence. A.I. is where the internet was 30 years ago and it's going to change everything. States will either help steer AI's impact, or they will struggle to keep pace. In Massachusetts, we pioneered the science for A.I. I want us to lead and for Massachusetts businesses and workers to get the benefit. See, A.I. will help us cure diseases faster. It will help model the impacts of climate change so we can better protect our coasts. It will help government move faster. This what Massachusetts does, better than anyone else! That's why we have funded a \$100 million A.I. Hub to back the scientists and startups whose breakthroughs will define our future. And we are investing in a data center in Holyoke that can support cutting-edge research by universities and businesses. We have put Massachusetts on the A.I. map. And our students, workers, and businesses will lead.

We're also going to keep leading on clean energy. The climate law we just passed speeds up permitting, so we can build infrastructure more quickly to get energy to homes and businesses. I want to thank the workers who are going to get this done, and thank you, AFL-CIO President Chrissy Lynch and your members. This is a big deal! It means cheaper energy, cleaner energy and energy independence. We are building new homes, labs, data centers and manufacturing plants. We need this power, and we're going to go get it.

Two-hundred and fifty years after we started a Revolution, it's Massachusetts' moment again. We'll lead the commemorations of America's founding and fire up our tourism economy.

We'll shine a light on our revolutions today the ideas and solutions that continue to make the world a better, freer place. This is a moment to know our past, understand our present, and build our future. In four days, there will be a transition of power in Washington. I assure you we will take every opportunity to work with the federal government in any way that benefits Massachusetts, and I also promise you we will not change who we are.

Sixty-four years and a week ago today, just days before his inauguration, President-elect John F. Kennedy spoke right here in this Chamber. In this moment, I think of his words which are now inscribed on the front of this very rostrum. He talked about what service requires of us. He spoke of "Courage ... judgment ... integrity ... dedication." Those are the values that must guide us now in our resolute focus on what people need and how we can work together to deliver for them. Because in this moment, our actions matter more than our words. Taking on the hard challenges matters. The choices and investments we make matter. The world we build for the next generation matters.

So, in a time that is too often defined by our differences, let's keep our eyes on the things we share in common. Let's recognize that our lives and fates are bound together. And let's work for the common good in our Commonwealth.

God bless you. God bless Massachusetts. God bless America.