



## The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

MASSACHUSETTS STATE SENATE  
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Committees

Senate Committee on Ways and Means, Chair

Dear Colleagues:

This budget is the fourth and final I will have the honor of presenting as Chairman of the Senate Committee on Ways and Means. I am happy to report that, as has been the case for each of my previous three budgets, the Senate Ways and Means FY 2015 budget improves upon the great work we have done in previous years.

Many of the themes present in this budget will strike a familiar note. Like each of the two most recent Senate Ways and Means budgets, we recommend full funding for Special Education Circuit Breaker. We also build on the funding increases we have provided to regional school transportation by proposing \$70.3M for this program in FY 2015. The funding recommendations in this budget would mark the highest level of support either of these programs has ever received.

Senate budgets have consistently emphasized the importance of a strong mental health system and this is no different. Our mental health funding supports maintenance of 45 inpatient beds at Taunton State Hospital and allows the two remaining inpatient wings at the Worcester Recovery Center and Hospital to open. Just as importantly, our budget provides \$10M in new funds to expand the number of community mental health placements offered throughout the state. We have a long way to go to ensure that all citizens have access to appropriate mental health services. However, by substantially increasing our state's capacity to provide both inpatient and outpatient services, I believe that this budget makes important strides in reaching that goal.

Education local aid and mental health are just two prominent examples of how our FY 2015 budget expands upon the priorities the Senate has articulated so well in recent budgets. In housing, this budget provides \$70M for the Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program, which combined with the funding increase the Senate fought for in FY 2014, represents a 67% funding increase for the program in two years. In early education, this budget once again dedicates substantial new funds, \$17.5M, to support and expand access to subsidized childcare. In veterans services, this budget marks the fourth consecutive year of funding increases for outreach centers and homeless shelters – funding increases that exceed 35% over that time period. The list goes on.

The goal of our budget proposal, however, is not simply to focus on the programs we have supported in the past. The goal is to put forward a document that reflects the challenges our Commonwealth faces, as well as the collective priorities of my colleagues. To that end, our

budget includes close to \$18.4M in new funding to provide substance abuse treatment, education and outreach. Similarly, our budget increases funding for our child welfare system by approximately \$40M over the FY 2014 budget. These two issues do not confront us for the first time, but the events of recent months have underlined the reality that the status quo is unacceptable and new resources and new ideas are required.

I am troubled by the seeming enormity of the challenges we face in issues like substance abuse and child welfare, but looking back over the past four budgets, I am heartened to consider the great challenges we have worked together to overcome.

In my four years as Chairman, we have restored cuts and made vital new investments in programs that help our neediest citizens. We have rebuilt our reserves, reduced our reliance on budget quick-fixes and seen the state's bond rating rise to its highest level ever. Most importantly, we have consistently responded to the policy and financial challenges we have been confronted with in a responsible, collegial and forward-thinking way.

I want to sincerely thank each and every one of my colleagues, past and present, for their partnership over these last four budgets and in each of my years in public service before that. I look forward to engrossing a Senate budget that is even stronger than the budget I present with pride today.

For the committee,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Steve Brewer". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Stephen M. Brewer