

May 11, 2021

To Members of the Massachusetts State Senate,

For the third time as Chair of the Senate Committee on Ways and Means, I have the honor to present you with the Committee's annual recommendations for the General Appropriations Act—the Fiscal Year 2022 (FY 2022) Budget.

Thank you to my friend, Senate President Karen Spilka, for her steady leadership and continued confidence in me to lead the Committee as we recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. I would like to also thank our colleagues in the House, Chair Michlewitz and his team in the House Committee on Ways and Means, and in the Administration, Secretary Heffernan and his team in the Executive Office for Administration and Finance. Our ongoing partnership and commitment to working together have helped us ensure that the Commonwealth's fiscal health is sound and strong.

It is hard to believe that it has been more than 425 days since Governor Baker declared a public health emergency in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and we began one of the most challenging and terrifying times in our Commonwealth's history. Yet, four months and eleven days into 2021, as we take steps towards a new normal and adapt to living with the omnipresent threat of the coronavirus, there is light at the end of the tunnel. More and more residents are being vaccinated daily, public health restrictions are slowly easing, schools have reopened safely and our economy is shaking off the lingering effects of this pandemic with tax revenue collections that continue to outperform expectations. While these encouraging signs seed hope and optimism, we recognize much more work is required of us before we can confidently say that this pandemic is finally behind us.

To that end, I present the Committee's FY 2022 budget for your consideration. The Committee's FY 2022 budget is a reflection of the dedicated advocacy of each Senator and the work of the incredibly devoted and talented Senate Ways and Means staff, who have worked tirelessly to produce two budgets since last fall. These budget recommendations are a forward-looking and responsible plan built on stable fiscal footing that address our emerging needs and build a more inclusive and resilient Commonwealth for all.

As a cornerstone of our Commonwealth's recovery, the Committee's budget ensures equitable access to educational opportunity and charts a path forward for students, families and educators.

The Senate remains committed to providing school districts with the resources necessary to ensure all students have equitable access to a high-quality education. Building off the more than \$2.6 billion in federal Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funding that school districts are eligible to receive, the Committee's budget re-affirms our unwavering support for the Student Opportunity Act (SOA). Consistent with the local aid agreement reached in March with our partners in the House Committee on Ways and Means, the

Committee budget provides \$220 million in additional Chapter 70 funding in FY 2022, which fully funds the first year of the SOA to ensure we get back on schedule for full implementation by FY 2027.

Recognizing the extraordinary educational costs and increases in staff needs caused by COVID-19, the Committee's budget maintains our long-standing support for children with disabilities, who deserve equal access to the same high-quality education as their peers, by funding the Special Education Circuit Breaker at \$387.9 million. Understanding that supporting early education and care programs serving at-risk children and their families remains a critical priority as well, the Committee's budget invests more than \$788.6 million to support our early educator workforce, expand access to underserved areas and provide high quality early childhood education opportunities for families across the Commonwealth. These collective investments are a reflection of the Senate's strong support for equitable access to inclusive educational opportunities for all of our students.

The Committee's budget confronts the frontline health care impacts of COVID-19 and meaningfully sustains support for our safety net, while safeguarding the health and wellness of our most vulnerable residents.

The pandemic has taken a considerable toll on our Commonwealth and strained our health care safety net. As the demand for emergency and inpatient psychiatric care has surged, the profound impact on our entire health care delivery system has made it clear that we must act. As such, the Committee's budget targets investments in mental and behavioral health to sustain our safety net programs and build a more resilient Commonwealth in the aftermath of the pandemic.

Dedicating nearly \$1 billion in resources, the Committee's budget safeguards the health and wellness of our most vulnerable citizens by ensuring access to a wide array of services and supports. It confronts the ongoing boarding crisis facing our emergency room departments and supports the urgent mental health needs of our children. It also addresses workforce challenges and expands access to critical services for our deserving veterans. In addition to focusing resources on an array of safety net services, the Committee's budget aims to enhance the efforts of local boards of public health to combat COVID-19, ensure equitable access to early intervention programs for underserved communities and support the needs of our children and individuals with intellectual or developmental disabilities in light of the pandemic.

Finally, the pandemic has demonstrated the critical need to support our children and families across the continuum of services that our Commonwealth provides. The Committee's budget provides \$23 million for Family Resource Centers to grow the mental health resources and programming available to families and \$6 million for a new grant program to help K-12 schools bolster social emotional learning supports for students coping with the fears, worries and anxieties that have been provoked by this public health crisis. The Committee's budget also provides \$3.9 million for the Office of the Child Advocate, including \$1 million for the establishment and operation of a state center on child wellness and trauma. We also invest nearly

\$500,000 to support quality assurance improvements at the Department of Children and Families as recommended by the Office of the Child Advocate in its review of the David Almond tragedy. Additionally, this budget includes \$2.5 million in resources to improve care available to children through our children's advocacy centers. Undoubtedly, with these actions, the Senate is safeguarding the health and wellness of our most vulnerable residents, including children and youth struggling in the wake of this pandemic.

To build a more inclusive and resilient Commonwealth, the Committee's budget expands economic opportunity and provides relief for working families.

The COVID-19 pandemic has wreaked havoc on households across the state, deepened economic insecurity and underscored poverty as a major barrier to families hoping to access doors of opportunity. As we work to emerge from this pandemic stronger and more resilient, we continue our work to ensure an equitable recovery and build a more inclusive Commonwealth. To support these efforts, the Committee's budget takes steps to strengthen supports for children and provide relief for working families.

The Senate recognizes that the pandemic has had a disparate impact on families struggling to access economic opportunity and break the cycle of poverty. To confront this challenge, the Committee's FY 2022 budget first addresses the increasing costs of caregiving for low-income families by converting existing tax deductions for children under 12, dependent adults and business-related dependent care expenses into refundable tax credits. Coupled with the expanded Child Tax Credit and the Child and Dependent Care tax credits under the federal American Rescue Plan Act, the Committee's child tax credit will help to lift 85,000 families out of poverty and support low-income working parents.

Additionally, the Committee's budget recommends continuing efforts to tackle 'deep poverty' with a 20 per cent increase to TAFDC and EAEDC benefits over December 2020 levels, ensuring families receive the economic supports they need to live, work and provide stability for their children. The Committee's budget also expands eligibility for these programs by eliminating the asset limits for both the TAFDC and EAEDC. This will allow families in need to receive economic assistance without having to spend down their savings accounts. With these steps, the Senate is supporting an equitable recovery that expands opportunity, provides relief, and builds a more inclusive and resilient Commonwealth.

Finally, the Committee's budget continues the work of supporting an equitable recovery for all and addressing the needs of our post-pandemic economic future.

Building off the FY 2021 budget, the Committee's FY 2022 budget continues to support an equitable recovery for all. It provides \$50 million for adult basic education services to increase access to skills and tools necessary to join the workforce, \$15 million to empower communities of color disproportionately impacted by the criminal justice system and \$6 million

to support economic growth in all corners of the Commonwealth through regional economic development grants. This budget also provides \$1 million to support historically underserved populations and enhance employment opportunities for young adults with disabilities.

The Senate also takes steps to address the workforce needs required to meet the demands of our post-pandemic economic future and invests \$8.5 million to expand our skilled worker population and provide residents access to career technical training opportunities. To meet the growing workforce demands of the burgeoning cybersecurity industry, this budget provides \$1.5 million in new investment to strengthen the talent pipeline in the cybersecurity industry through the development and expansion of internship, training and employment opportunities in coordination with our state universities and community colleges, and preparing our Commonwealth to confront the cybersecurity threats of tomorrow.

Once again, thank you to my friend and partner, Senate President Karen Spilka, for her continued leadership and her confidence in me to lead the Committee. I would also like to thank the members of the Senate Committee on Ways and Means, especially Vice Chair Senator Cindy Friedman of Arlington, Assistant Vice Chair Senator Jason Lewis of Winchester and Ranking Minority Member Senator Patrick O'Connor of Weymouth for their counsel, contributions and thoughtful collaboration that have helped to guide the Committee's FY 2022 budget recommendations.

Finally, thank you to my colleagues for your continued work in advocating for your communities and the programs that you care so deeply about. I recognize the challenges and difficulties we have all faced throughout this last year. Because of our efforts to collaborate, listen and learn, this budget is once again a strong reflection of our shared priorities.

I look forward to continuing our work together to address the emerging and evolving needs of our Commonwealth—responding to ongoing behavioral health and public health challenges made visible by this pandemic, supporting our most vulnerable populations and ensuring our state's finances remain in sound fiscal health, while building a more inclusive and resilient Commonwealth for all.

For the Committee,



Michael J. Rodrigues

Chair, Senate Committee on Ways and Means