

House of Representatives Bill Summary

Bill# H.56 sections 1 to 17, 20 to 44, 73 to 82, and 87
Title: An Act empowering municipalities and local government
Sponsor: Governor Maura Healey
Committee: Municipalities and Regional Government
Hearing Date: October 28, 2025
Prior History: S.2571 (2023-2024) reported as committee redraft
S.2827 (Municipalities); Senate Ways and Means; no further action.
H.4788 (Revenue); House Ways and Means; no further action taken.

Current Law: MGL Ch. 30A, Sections 18-25: Open Meeting Law
Ch. 30B: Uniform Procurement Act
Ch. 40: Powers and duties of cities and towns
Ch. 44: Municipal Finance Law
Ch. 44B: Community Preservation Act
Ch. 71: Public Schools; School Transportation; Regional School Districts
Ch. 94C: Controlled Substances Act
Ch. 151A: Unemployment Insurance
Ch. 164: Manufacturer and sale of gas and electricity; Section 34B: Replacement of existing poles
Ch. 268A: Conduct of public officials and employees (ethics)

Section 1 increases the membership of the Public Health Council from six to seven, with the new member to be appointed by the Governor from a list of 3 nominated by the Coalition for Local Public Health.

Make Permanent COVID-era Flexibilities: Public Meeting (§§ 2-5) – These sections make permanent COVID-era flexibilities related to hybrid public meetings. They permit public bodies to hold meetings in a remote or hybrid format and make technical corrections to open meeting requirements.

Section 2 amends the Open Meeting Law by inserting before the definition of "Deliberation" a new definition for "Adequate, alternative means of public access" to mean measures that allow timely and effective public access to the deliberations of a public body, including telephone, internet, audio or video conferencing or similar technology.

Section 3 also amends the Open Meeting Law to ensure that all meetings of a public body shall be physically accessible to the public, but if the meeting takes place in a public

place, the public body shall ensure that the public can fully participate through adequate, alternative means of public access, offered free of charge to the public.

Section 4 amends the same law, in Section 20 of Chapter 30A, by authorizing a public body to allow remote participation in any meeting by any or all members of the public body, without the need for members to be physically present to ensure a quorum, and without requiring prior approval of the attorney general as provided in the current law.

Section 5 further amends the Open Meeting Law by requiring minutes of all open and executive sessions to be created and approved in a timely manner. The current law requires such minutes to be made available upon request by any person within 10 days.

Municipal Procurement (§§ 6-17) – These sections amend Chapter 30B as follows:

Section 6 amends the provision in Section 1 of the law that exempts certain activities from the Uniform Procurement Act, by exempting snow hauling to match the existing exemption for snow removal.

Section 7 updates the Chapter 30B section on exemptions in a few areas to ensure the references correspond with the proper sections of general law, such as for design selection, roadway construction and energy procurements.

Sections 10 and 11 Increases from \$50,000 to \$100,000 the maximum value of a supply or service for which a procurement officer may seek written quotations from at least 3 persons customarily providing such supply or service. The first change increases the threshold beyond which public advertising is required, while the second change relates to the threshold for competitive sealed bidding procedures.

Section 12 eliminates the requirement to publish notice of invitations for competitive bids on COMMBUYS; gives municipalities flexibility to choose means of public notice.

Section 13 through 16 Increases the Chapter 30B thresholds for advertised procurements from \$50k to \$100k for all municipal purchasing, not just schools. These changes affect the provisions relating to competitive sealed bidding proposals, requests for proposals, utilization of reverse auctions for the acquisition of supplies and services, and sole source procurements.

Section 17 Enables groups of cities and towns to award multiple contracts through the RFP process and purchase both supplies and services from collectively bid contracts;

Municipal Finance (§§ 20-21, 23-24)

Section 20 amends Section 5B of Chapter 40 by including money assessed

through Section 10 of Chapter 60A (which is added through Section 66 of H.56) in the list of amounts that may be dedication to stabilization funds.

Section 21 amends Section 42A of Chapter 40 by adding language requiring a copy of the certificate of a municipality's acceptance of Sections 42A through 42F, inclusive, to be filed with said municipality's respective collector of taxes.

Section 22 edits Chapter 40 by adding a section mandating municipalities to report cybersecurity incidents to the Commonwealth Security Operations Center in a manner to be regulated by the Executive Office of Technology Services and Security.

Section 23 amends Chapter 40Q by allowing municipal sinking funds and project cost receipts to be spent without appropriation.

Section 24 empowers municipalities to combine the positions of collector of taxes and treasurers into a single position.

Section 25 edits Section 23A of Chapter 41 by allowing town administrators to serve between 1 and 5 years, rather than 1 or 3.

Section 26 amends Section 30B of Chapter 41 by allowing municipalities to enter into intermunicipal, financial official sharing agreements, albeit barring assessors, select board members, and school committee members.

Section 27 adds Section 30B1/2 to Chapter 41, which provides for Regional Boards of Assessors and any necessary staff therein to carry out the functions of local Boards of Assessors as defined in a predetermined agreement.

Borrowing for Acquisition of Interest in Land (§§ 28-30) – These sections clarify municipal borrowing authority for acquisition of interests in land, construction or renovation of improvements to real estate, and improvements to waterways by requiring that the property interest, waterways, improvements to real estate, or projects for renovation or construction for which borrowing is undertaken under authority of § 7(1) be municipally owned or leased.

Section 31 amends Section 7 of Chapter 44 by increasing the maximum indebtedness for constructing or reconstructing a school facility from 30 to 40 years.

Regional School Districts Refunding Bonds Technical Correction

Sections 32, 33, and 34 amend Section 21A of Chapter 44 by including regional school district's school committees in lists of entities permitted to issue refunding bonds.

Section 35 edits Section 31 of Chapter 44 by allowing municipalities to amortize deficit

spending related to emergency measures over 3 years, rather than within 1.

Section 36 amends Section 32 of Chapter 44 by adding language allowing appropriations within continuing budgets to be spent without further action by the relevant governing council, provided that their purposes may not diverge from what was previously approved.

Section 37 edits Section 53A of Chapter 44 by making the principal governing board of a city or town the default accepting entity for any gift made to the municipality, even if addressed to a specific department or officer.

Section 38 amends Section 53A1/2 of Chapter 44 by eliminating the requirement that salaries paid out of a municipal revolving fund statute must also cover fringe benefits associated with such payments.

Section 39 amends Section 53E1/2 of Chapter 44 by replacing the requirement for municipalities to vote annually on revolving funds' spending caps to only be required before the first year it shall apply.

Section 40 augments Section 53F1/2 of Chapter 44 by allowing enterprise funds to be created for broadband-only municipal light plants and landfills.

Section 41 edits Section 53F3/4 of Chapter 44 by making language consistent with Section 42.

Section 42 amends Section 53F3/4 of Chapter 44 by allowing municipalities to create a separate revenue account for cable-related purposes without further appropriation.

Chapter 43 amends Chapter 44 by adding a Section 74, which clarifies that any funds received by a municipality for infrastructure construction or repairs, including Chapter 90 apportionments, may be spent without further appropriations. Additionally, it empowers municipalities to spend in anticipation of funds, albeit with a reporting mechanism if any expenditures are not reimbursed at the close of the fiscal year.

Chapter 44 edits Section 5 of Chapter 44B by adding language requiring land purchases made through the Community Preservation Act be approved by a two-thirds majority vote.

Section 73 repeals the law (Section 7C of MGL Chapter 71) which limits the availability of state funding to start in-house school bus services when private transportation companies are available.

Section 74 This section modifies G.L. c. 71, § 16B 1/2 to conform to joint guidance promulgated by the Division of Local Services (DLS) and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) concerning the divisions' calculation of Regional School District Excess and Deficiency fund. If the amount left in the fund exceeds 5

percent of its operating budget, then the excess shall be used to reduce the assessment paid by member cities and towns in the same proportion as is paid according to the terms of the agreement for apportionment of costs.

Fentanyl Strips (§§ 75-76) – These sections declassify fentanyl strips as drug paraphernalia and clarify that anyone who in good faith administers fentanyl test strips shall not be subject to criminal or civil liability.

Unemployment Insurance (§§ 77-78) – These sections extend existing exemptions from unemployment insurance benefits, which are applicable to school employees absent during sabbaticals and school vacations with a “reasonable assurance” of returning to work, to employees who provide services to or on behalf of schools but are paid by municipalities. These sections also reduce the amount of unemployment insurance benefits to 65% for employees receiving government pensions.

Double Pole Enforcement (§ 79) – This section allows cities and towns to enforce the statutory prohibition on keeping double poles after passing a local ordinance authorizing them to do so. The current 90-day requirement timeline for replacement would be increased to 180 days and penalties authorized to be imposed are limited to up to \$1,000 per occurrence. The language also authorizes the Department of Public Utilities and Department of Telecommunications and Cable to promulgate regulations to develop enforcement mechanisms and enhanced processes for addressing double poles.

Shared Employees (§ 80) – This section creates a limited exception to the conflict-of-interest law in order to address potential violations of the law that arise when cities and towns share employees under inter-municipal agreements (IMAs) or other regional arrangements. It allows an employee of one city or town to take actions consistent with the shared goals of the agreement.

Bond and Note Premiums (§ 81) – This section requires communities that used a Proposition 2 ½ debt excluded premium on capital to report the premium without adjusting the debt exclusion.

Election Cost Reimbursement (§ 82) – This section allows state reimbursements for Early Voting and Extended Polling Hours to both be accounted for in a special revenue fund, simplifying the budgeting process for elections. Currently, the former is treated as General Fund revenue and the latter is accounted for in a special revenue fund.

Section 87 states that Section 79, which concerns double utility poles, shall take effect 1 year after the effective date of this act.