

SUSTAINING OUR COMMON WEALTH

The creation of Massachusetts as a Commonwealth in 1780 marked a profound shift in history. No longer would we be a colony ruled by a foreign individual singularly invested with the powers of a king; instead, we would turn to each other to create a society in which the power and responsibility to lead would be invested in each of us, the people.

Since then, the term Commonwealth—‘*common wealth*’—has served to remind us that each of us is also invested in preserving our common good; that our fortunes rise and fall together.

In the context of the Senate Ways and Means Fiscal Year 2018 recommendations, our common wealth of course refers to the dollars and cents that make up the state’s budget. But it also signifies so much more.

I believe that, ultimately, our true *common wealth* is our people.

To that end, two years ago, we put resources towards Lifting All Families, knowing that access to meaningful work and reliable housing was necessary to put our families on the path to success. Last year, we focused on building resiliency in children, families and communities so that our Commonwealth would be resilient if, and when, we entered tough fiscal times.

We face unsteady times. Not only do we appear to be heading towards the tough fiscal times we have prepared for, federal policy threatens to create uncertainty about everything from health care to economic stability to the protection of basic civil rights. It is therefore more important than ever for the citizens of Massachusetts to once again turn to each other and recommit to the work of creating and sustaining our Commonwealth.

We can sustain our common wealth by focusing on the fundamentals: education, health and wellbeing, and housing.

Education has always been Massachusetts’ lodestar, from the origination of our Constitution to the birth of public education under the guidance of former Senate President and Franklin native Horace Mann. With investments in Chapter 70 education funding, the furthering of our commitment to implement the recommendations of the Foundation Budget Review Commission, continued funding for our excellent institutions of higher education and a bold expansion of preschool access, we place our faith in public education as the greatest equalizer and catalyst for success.

Embracing the challenges posed by maintaining the health and wellbeing of our residents means that we can proactively tackle the issue of rising health care costs while continuing to encourage the adoption of innovative, evidence-based practices that will make all of us healthier and more productive. Our budget recommendations explore a number of options designed to bring down costs associated with health care. At the same time, we reaffirm our values in caring for those who need our help, including children, the elderly, persons with disabilities and veterans.

Finally, there can be no security for individuals and families without access to reliable housing. The persistence of homelessness, particularly amongst families with children, offends our very notion of a Commonwealth, where all citizens are guaranteed by the Massachusetts Constitution, “the power of enjoying in safety and tranquility their natural rights, and the blessings of life.” We therefore suggest significant investment in a number of housing initiatives, including accelerating the distribution of rental vouchers for families facing housing emergencies. We believe that our investments to prevent homelessness support best practices in putting individuals and families on the path towards stability.

The Committee is clear-eyed about the fiscal environment in which we release our recommendations, but we are nevertheless proud of our investments. We stand firm in our belief that money spent on providing hope and opportunity for our people is money well spent.

Senate President Stan Rosenberg continues to be a stalwart leader when it comes to remaining true to the values we hold dear, and I thank him for his steadfast guidance. I would also like to thank the members of the Senate Ways and Means Committee, in particular my Vice Chair Sal DiDomenico of Everett, Assistant Vice Chair Pat Jehlen of Somerville and Ranking Minority Member Viriato deMacedo of Plymouth for their thoughtful contributions to, and dedicated work on, the FY 2018 budget. Thank you also to House Ways and Means Chairman Brian Dempsey for your continued partnership in tackling tough budgets.

Helping each other has been a core Massachusetts value at least since the time of Horace Mann. We are about to be tested by difficult times, and the Senate believes that our response should be to continue to turn to each other and care for each other. Doing otherwise would cause us to forfeit the legacy of our Commonwealth, which is to foster our common good, protect our common values and sustain our common wealth.



Karen E. Spilka
Chair, Senate Committee on Ways and Means