

## A Challenging But Productive Legislative Session

The Massachusetts state legislature recently wrapped up one of its most challenging and productive legislative sessions in decades. Although much of the media attention has focused on an expanded gambling bill that did not pass this session, many important pieces of legislation were enacted and signed into law by Governor Patrick.

The global recession has caused hardship for many families and small businesses in our communities and across the country. The recession also led to a dramatic fall in state tax revenues, precipitating a fiscal crisis for state and local governments.

The top priority of the legislature and the Governor has been steering the state and our communities through this crisis, and working to get the economy in Massachusetts growing again and creating new jobs. We passed a variety of bills to help families, small businesses, and municipalities struggling in the recession:

- ***Economic Development and Job Creation.*** This legislation creates the Massachusetts Growth Capital Corporation to help small businesses access the capital they need, reduces the capital gains tax rate for long-term investments in Massachusetts-based startup companies, and consolidates a number of state economic development agencies to make their efforts more efficient and effective.
- ***Municipal Relief.*** This bill helps financially strapped cities and towns by establishing a statewide mutual aid agreement to allow municipalities to more easily share resources and promote greater regionalization efforts.
- ***CORI Reform.*** This legislation helps put former offenders back to work, updates sentencing laws, and increases public safety.
- ***Foreclosure Prevention.*** This bill establishes protections for tenants living in a property that has been foreclosed, and provides new provisions to govern interactions between a lender and homeowner during the right to cure period.

Massachusetts has been a leader in providing high quality healthcare to all its residents. However, ever increasing healthcare costs have become a significant burden for many families, businesses, and government. Continuing the reform efforts begun in 2006, the state legislature passed a number of important healthcare-related bills this past session:

- ***Small Business Healthcare Costs.*** This law authorizes small businesses to group together for greater purchasing power when buying health insurance, bans anti-competitive contract provisions between insurers and healthcare providers, and allows regulators to

disapprove insurance rates if there are excessive administrative costs or surplus margins.

- **Autism Insurance.** This bill requires health insurers to cover essential diagnostic tests, medical treatment and services for children and adults with autism spectrum disorders.
- **Silver Alert Program:** This bill creates an alert system to help locate a person impaired with Alzheimer's disease or dementia who wanders from home and becomes lost.

While working to navigate through the difficult economy, the state legislature and Governor Patrick have also been focused on helping the state emerge stronger from the recession by investing in education. Massachusetts' knowledge economy is driven by our strong K-12 schools and world-class higher education institutions. We passed a number of bills this legislative session to continue to strengthen our schools:

- **Closing the Achievement Gap.** This bill will help close the achievement gap by giving greater authority to superintendents and the state to intervene in chronically underperforming schools, lifting the cap on charter schools in the lowest performing districts, and helping to facilitate innovation and excellence in all schools.
- **Chapter 70 Study.** I successfully introduced an amendment to the Achievement Gap bill that calls for a study of the Chapter 70 school funding formula to help build the case for Chapter 70 reform.
- **Anti-Bullying.** This law prohibits bullying and cyber-bullying, directs schools to implement bullying prevention and intervention plans, and requires school staff to report incidents of bullying.
- **School Nutrition.** This bill institutes guidelines for more nutritious foods and beverages to be made available to students at school.

The legislature passed two major bills aimed at improving our transportation system, saving taxpayer money, and making our roads safer:

- **Transportation Reform.** This legislation eliminated the Turnpike Authority and consolidated various state transportation agencies in order to save money and provide better management and coordination of road, bridge, port, and public transit systems.
- **Safe Driving.** This bill bans text messaging while driving for all drivers, bans any use of a mobile device for junior operators and public transit system operators, and authorizes and indemnifies healthcare providers and law enforcement to notify the RMV of any driver who may not be able to safely operate a vehicle.

This past session was also marked by sweeping reforms to make our state government more accountable and transparent to the people of the Commonwealth. Major reforms included:

- ***Pension Reform.*** This bill closes a number of loopholes that had been exploited in the public pension system and creates a Commission to investigate additional ways to ensure the pension system's fiscal soundness.
- ***Ethics and Lobbying Reform.*** This legislation strengthens current ethics, lobbying and campaign finance laws, and increases the authority of the State Ethics Commission and Attorney General to investigate and prosecute alleged violations.
- ***Budget and Spending Transparency.*** This bill creates a website to provide the public with online access to all state spending, including tax credits, to ensure robust budget and spending transparency.

There were many other bills that passed during this legislative session that will help residents and businesses across the Commonwealth. One, in particular, is a bill that I sponsored to help Zoo New England (which includes the Stone Zoo in our district) raise new private sources of revenue, rely less on state funding, and become more self-sufficient. This was my first bill as a "freshman" state representative to become law.

Some important bills that did not pass this session gained momentum and will no doubt be revisited when the next legislative session begins in January, 2011. I encourage you to continue to advocate for legislation that you support and would like to see enacted.

I welcome your input and feedback. Please visit our website at [www.RepJasonLewis.com](http://www.RepJasonLewis.com). You can also reach me at (617) 722-2060 or by email at [Jason.Lewis@state.ma.us](mailto:Jason.Lewis@state.ma.us).

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