



# The Commonwealth

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## -- MEDIA ADVISORY --

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### House Passes Balanced FY '12 Budget

(BOSTON) - State Representative William Straus yesterday joined his colleagues in the Massachusetts House of Representatives in passing a balanced FY '12 budget. The budget, which passed with the bipartisan support of all but one Republican Representative, closes a projected \$1.9 billion budget gap through cuts to state spending totaling \$1.2 billion.

"With this budget, we are getting the most value we can from limited state dollars and striving to implement sensible reforms that protect taxpayers," House Speaker Robert A. DeLeo said. "In difficult times like these, we've produced a budget that protects essential services and shields our neediest residents while bringing new efficiencies and cost savings to state government."

"Without additional federal resources available to assist in closing the budget gap, the House budget provides tools to aid cash-strapped municipalities and implements reforms that generate real savings and protect necessary services across the Commonwealth."

"I'm pleased that, in this budget, we were able to increase government efficiencies and contain costs while still preserving essential services throughout the state" said Representative Straus.

"As Chairman of the Joint Committee on Transportation, I was able to help with floor amendments adding to the Transportation budget some thoughtful, cost-saving solutions without adding money to the budget's bottom line. For example, we were able to secure a study for the Massachusetts Department of Transportation to identify and determine additional recurring revenues through utility right-of-way leasing; with this information, the Department will be able to maximize revenue to the Commonwealth without riders incurring any increased costs" Straus explained. "We were also able to ensure Regional Transit Authorities (RTAs) were adequately funded and will be able to continue providing bus service for residents in my district and across Massachusetts."

"I was pleased to have voted for this budget," said House Minority Leader Bradley H. Jones, Jr. "It is a fair and reasonable product that I think deserves serious consideration by the Senate. It is my hope that the final budget is similar to that of the House budget."

Without federal resources available to assist in closing the budget gap, the \$30.52 billion budget contains major reductions in many areas of state spending, including the total elimination of funding for several line items.

For the second consecutive year, the House budget does not contain any new taxation proposals.

The House budget does provide important school aid increases under Chapter 70 to municipalities to \$3.99 billion, an increase of \$120 million over the state's FY '11 contribution. Schools would also receive an additional \$80 million for the Special Education Circuit Breaker for an FY '12 total of \$213 million. To further assist municipalities, the budget includes \$9.7 million for regionalization incentive grants to help municipalities save money through the regionalization of services.

Through debate on the House floor, the budget restored funding for the Commonwealth Care Bridge program and adult day health. Debate on the budget also resulted in the addition of \$5 million for local tourist councils, \$1 million for higher education scholarships, \$1.5 million for the METCO program and \$3 million for Shannon grants.

Also included in the budget is a plan to generate \$53 million in savings within the Counsel for Public Services (CPCS). These savings would be realized through a series of initiatives such as capping private bar hours, increasing the number of full-time public defenders and strengthening indigency verification procedures.

The budget would also prohibit the use of electronic benefit transfer cards for the purchase of alcoholic beverages, lottery tickets, or tobacco products. Individuals or store owners who knowingly accept payment for these items through electronic benefit cards will be subject to a fine.

To help grow and keep jobs in Massachusetts, the budget establishes the Workforce Training Fund as a trust fund, meaning it will remain fully funded and used exclusively for workforce training programs as initially intended. To promote business expansion, the budget does not include the market sourcing and hotel tax provisions from the Governor's budget which, all told, would have cost businesses some \$28 million.

Seeking a more predictable tax climate, the budget also requires the Department of Revenue to publish any new directives and policies in development on its website for at least two months. Furthermore, the budget provides greater incentive for the state to settle taxpayer audits in a timely fashion by waiving the penalty assessed on the amount in controversy if the audit takes longer than 18 months.

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