

An Act Enabling Partnerships for Growth provides the residents of Massachusetts a COVID-19 relief and recovery package that will provide desperately needed support to our restaurant and tourism sectors, small businesses, as well as those who have been significantly impacted by the Coronavirus pandemic, while also creating a Future of Work Commission, establishing protections for student loan borrowers, and ushering in zoning reforms that will encourage housing development and access in our communities. The House and Senate collaborated to produce a comprehensive economic development bill allocating \$627,181,000 in capital authorizations across housing, community development, small business recovery, broadband expansion, neighborhood revitalization, climate resilience, vocational and career training, and higher education.

POLICY ITEMS

HOUSING

Housing Choice

Implements zoning reform to help cities and towns approve smart growth zoning and affordable housing by lowering the required vote threshold for a range of housing-related zoning changes and special permits at the local level from a two-thirds supermajority to a simple majority. Housing production is an integral part of economic development and recovery. Therefore, these provisions will cut the red tape that stands in the way of housing production and provide municipalities with the tools necessary to spur housing production in the Commonwealth.

MBTA Communities

Requires designated MBTA communities to be zoned for at least one district of reasonable size, as defined in the Act, in which multi-family housing is permitted as of right. Requires such housing to be suitable for families with children.

Zoning Appeals

Allows judges to require non-municipal parties who appeal special permits, site plan review, and variances to post a bond up to \$50,000 to secure statutory costs. Provides judges with discretion to consider the merits of the appeal and the relative financial ability of the parties.

HDIP Programmatic changes

Requires at least 10% of units to be affordable (i) rental units for people whose income is not more than 60% of the area median income, or (ii) owner-occupied units for people whose income is not more than 80% of the area median income; amends the HDIP program to increase transparency and equity.

40R Smart Growth

Permits DHCD to establish smart growth design standards; clarifies that mixed use development is allowed; place limitations on density bonus payments for housing in districts limited to age-restricted, disabled, or assisted living populations; enhance DHCD's ability to claw back incentive payments if a community repeals 40R zoning.

Tenant’s Right to Purchase

Creates a local option establishing a tenant’s right of first refusal and outlines a process by which tenants occupying a residential property may purchase said property prior to its sale or foreclosure.

Eviction Record Sealing

Seals all no-fault eviction records.

Minors & Eviction Records

Prohibits minors from being named in a summary process summons; requires expungement of the names of any minors from any court record or electronic docket.

Local Housing Authority Board Member Elections

Amends provisions related to the election of local housing board members and modifies the definition of the tenant member on such boards by expanding seat eligibility to tenants with signed leases for public housing operated by the local housing authority, tenants in public housing operated on behalf of the housing authority, participants in rental housing assistance programs operated by a housing authority, or a resident of any such housing units over the age of 18.

Low-income Housing Tax Credit

Increases the state low-income housing tax credit program cap from \$20,000,000 to \$40,000,000.

CONSUMER PROTECTIONS

Student Loan Bill of Rights

Establishes a new G.L. c. 93L regulating the licensing and operation of student loan servicers by the Commissioner of Banks; establishes a Student Loan Ombudsman within the Office of the Attorney General for the purpose of receiving, reviewing and assisting in the resolution of complaints from student loan borrowers; authorizes the Ombudsman to assist with repayment options, applying for federal loan forgiveness programs, ending wage and tax refund garnishments, resolving billing disputes, and obtaining loan details.

Motor Vehicle Insurance and Registration

Requires insurers, licensed insurance producers, or third- party representatives to verify an applicant’s Massachusetts driving history before processing a payment or issuing a policy when they utilize driving history as a rating or an underwriting factor for motor vehicle insurance; requires the insurer or insurance producer to provide a disclosure regarding the verification of the applicant’s driving history when issuing a quote, allowing consumers to understand that an initial quote for a policy may differ from the final cost of the policy, after driving history is checked.

COVID-19 PANDEMIC RELIEF AND RECOVERY

Third-Party Delivery Fee Caps

Limits fees charged by third-party delivery services for restaurants to 15% during the COVID-19 state of emergency; prohibits third-party delivery service companies from reducing rates for delivery drivers or garnishing gratuities as result of this Act.

Commission on Cultural and Creative Sector

Creates a commission to examine and make recommendations on addressing the recovery of the cultural and creative sector, including the arts, humanities and sciences, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

EMPLOYEE PROTECTIONS, BUSINESS GROWTH, AND EQUITY

Tourism Destination Marketing Districts

Enables, via local option, the creation of tourism destination marketing districts ("TDMDs"), made up of hotels, motels, and bed and breakfasts, for purpose of generating local revenue dedicated solely for the promotion and marketing of specific regions of the Commonwealth.

Waitstaff Employees

Amends the statutory definition of wait staff employee to include a person in a quick service restaurant who prepares or serves food or beverages as part of a team of counter staff; further amends that definition to clarify that such an employee has no managerial responsibility during a day in which the person serves beverages or prepared food or clears patrons' tables.

Paid Family Medical Leave

Provides that the taking of family or medical leave shall not affect an employee's right to accrue vacation time, sick leave, bonuses, advancement, seniority, length-of-service credit or other employment benefits, plans or programs.

Grand Bargain Premium Holiday Fix

Requires retail employers to pay employees time and a half holiday pay for working on New Years Day, Columbus Day/Indigenous People's Day, and Veterans Day.

Natural Hair Braiding & Licensing

Exempts natural hair braiding from the definition of hairdressing, and exempts natural hair braiding from rules and regulations pertaining to aesthetics, barbering, cosmetology, electrolysis, hairdressing and manicuring.

PRIM Investment Board

Encourages the PRIM Board to use minority investment managers to manage PRIT Fund assets, where appropriate, and to increase the racial, ethnic, and gender diversity of Fund investments.

Mass Maritime Piers Repair and Rehabilitation Program

Establishes a Maritime Piers Repair and Rehabilitation Program within the Massachusetts Development Finance Agency to make grants and loans for the reconstruction, repair, renovation or rehabilitation of existing commercial and marine industrial infrastructure and public or private maritime transportation infrastructure.

Transient Vendor License Extension

Expands the transient vendors license from one to three years.

Minority and Women Enterprise Study

Creates a special commission to identify ways to grow minority and women business enterprises in public construction.

Commission on Journalism

Establishes a commission of experts, industry members, academics, and elected officials to research and propose policy solutions related to the decline of local journalism in Massachusetts and the future sustainability of the industry.

AGRICULTURE AND RURAL SUPPORT

Rural Growth Fund

Establishes the Rural Jobs Tax Credit for businesses that make a capital contribution to a rural growth fund, established within the Office of Business Development.

Healthy Soils Program and Fund

Expands the Food Policy Council to include an expert in healthy soil practices; codifies the definition of "healthy soils;"; gives the Commission for Conservation of Soil and Water the ability to establish a Massachusetts Healthy Soils Program and Fund.

Cranberry Renovation Tax Credit

Establishes a tax credit equal to 25 per cent of the total qualified renovation expenditures for a cranberry bog, not to exceed \$100,000 and capped at \$2,000,000 per year.

TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION

Personal Vehicle Sharing Insurance

Clarifies that carsharing platforms may obtain insurance coverage from non-admitted carriers and that carsharing platforms do not need their own insurance-producer or broker licenses to offer or maintain insurance policies for carsharing vehicles or drivers.

Future of Work Commission

Creates a special commission to conduct a comprehensive study relative to the impact of automation, artificial intelligence, global trade, access to new forms of data and the internet of things on the workforce, businesses and economy.

BONDING ITEMS

In total, the economic development bill includes \$627,181,000 in authorizations for housing, economic, and community development coupled with mandates of social, racial, economic, and geographic equity where appropriate.

Site Readiness Program (7002-8000)

Authorizes \$15,000,000 for the Site Readiness Program administered by MassDevelopment to continue making sites ready for development through site assembly and assessment, permitting, and other predevelopment activities.

Massachusetts Growth Capital Corporation - CDFIs (7002-8001)

Authorizes \$35,000,000 for the Massachusetts Growth Capital Corporation to provide matching grants to community development financial institutions certified by the U.S. Treasury or community development corporations certified under M.G.L c. 40H.

Massachusetts Broadband Incentive Fund (7002-8002)

Authorizes \$5,000,000 to fund the Massachusetts Broadband Incentive Fund for maintenance of broadband infrastructure owned by the Massachusetts Technology Park Corporation in Central and Western Massachusetts.

Massachusetts Technology Collaborative (7002-8003)

Authorizes \$10,000,000 in matching grants to support collaboration among manufacturers located in the Commonwealth and institutions of higher education, nonprofits and other public or quasi-public entities.

Technology Research & Development & Innovation Fund (7002-8004)

Authorizes \$52,000,000 for the Scientific and Technology Research and Development Matching Grant Fund to foster additional scientific and technology research and development in the Commonwealth.

Rural Community Development & Infrastructure Grants (7002-8027)

Authorizes \$20,000,000 for a competitive grant program fund dedicated to supporting community development, infrastructure projects, and climate resilience initiatives in rural communities and small towns.

Massachusetts Growth Capital Corporation – Microbusiness Grants (7002-8028)

Authorizes \$25,000,000 for the Massachusetts Growth Capital Corporation, in consultation with the microbusiness development center, to administer a grant program to provide capital for micro-businesses and low-to-moderate income entrepreneurs looking to start or expand a new business.

Travel & Tourism Matching Grants (7002-8029)

Authorizes \$14,000,000 for a competitive grant program to improve facilities and destinations visited by travelers in order to increase visitation, entice repeat visitation through marketing and other means, and increase the direct and indirect economic impacts of the tourism industry in all regions of the Commonwealth.

Blighted Buildings Redevelopment Program (7002-8031)

Authorizes \$40,000,000 for a program to support the redevelopment of underutilized, blighted, or abandoned buildings.

Regional & Community Assistance Planning Grants (7002-8032)

Authorizes \$10,000,000 for planning initiatives undertaken by individual municipalities, joint cities or towns, or entire regions working together to address shared goals related to community development, housing production or other issues of local and regional concern.

Employment Social Enterprise Capital Grant Program (7002-8033)

Authorizes \$27,700,000 for the establishment of an Employment Social Enterprise Capital Grant Program to be administered by EOHEd.

Restaurant COVID-19 Grants (7002-8034)

Authorizes \$20,000,000 for a program administered by EOHEd to provide financial and capital assistance to restaurants impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Commonwealth Zoological Corporation (7002-8034)

Authorizes \$12,500,000 for the Commonwealth Zoological Corporation for capital improvements necessary for the operation of the Zoo New England, Franklin Park Zoo, and the Walter D. Stone Memorial Zoo.

COVID-19 State Payroll Protection Program (7002-8035)

Authorizes \$30,000,000 for the Massachusetts Growth Corporation to provide small business loans to those impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic to pay employee payroll, mortgage interest, rent, utilities and interest on other debt obligations.

Local Economic Development Projects (7002-8036)

Authorizes \$102,304,000 for local economic development projects throughout Massachusetts.

Urban Agriculture Grant Program (7002-8037)

Authorizes \$2,000,000 for capital grants for urban farms as defined in this act.

Lottery Commission IT (0640-0100)

Authorizes \$15,000,000 for IT related projects at the state lottery commission.

Massachusetts Cultural Council Grants (0640-0303)

Authorizes \$6,000,000 for a competitive grant program administered by the MCC to promote artists in creating new mediums to showcase their art, and to promote local museums to showcase their exhibits remotely.

Massachusetts Cultural Council Public School Grants (0640-0304)

Authorizes \$5,000,000 for a competitive grant program to be administered by the MCC, in consultation with DESE, to help public schools provide access to cultural experiences in the community through remote means in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Cultural Facilities Grants (0640-0305)

Authorizes \$20,000,000 for a non-profit infrastructure and equipment competitive grant program administered by the MCC to provide means to safely and sustainably reopen to the public while upholding necessary public health and social distancing protocols during the COVID-19 pandemic.

TRC Virtual Mediation Services (1102-5702)

Authorizes \$15,000,000 to make improvements at the trial courts to support virtual mediation services.

Transit-Oriented Housing Developments (7004-0059)

Authorizes \$50,000,000 in the form of grants and loans for transit-oriented housing and the production of high-density mixed-income affordable housing near transit modes.

Climate-Resilient Affordable Housing Developments (7004-0064)

Authorizes \$10,000,000 for sustainable and climate-resilient construction in affordable, multifamily housing developments to better respond to climate change and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Neighborhood Stabilization (7004-0065)

Authorizes \$50,000,000 for neighborhood stabilization to help return blighted or vacant housing back to productive use.

Gateway Cities Housing Program (7004-0066)

Authorizes \$5,000,000 in a Gateway City housing pilot program to support the construction of shovel-ready market-rate housing opportunities.

Vocational School Expansion Grants (7035-2020)

Authorizes \$15,000,000 for capital grants to vocational technical schools to expand operating capacities and reduce wait lists.

Higher Education Workforce Grants (7066-2020)

Authorizes \$15,000,000 for a grant program administered by the Department of Higher Education to support career-oriented programs and initiatives at community colleges.