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Senator Anne Gobi Secures 80% Reimbursement for Regional School Transportation in Senate Budget

BOSTON – Senator Anne M. Gobi (D-Spencer) has announced a unanimous vote by the Massachusetts Senate to increase regional school transportation reimbursement funding during Tuesday’s budget debate. The amendment, filed by Senator Gobi, raises the reimbursement rate to 80 percent of full funding, at a total of \$68,878,679 - a \$7,357,679 increase over FY18 funding.

“This 80% reimbursement is a positive step towards the 100% promised by the State when schools were encouraged to regionalize,” said Senator Gobi. “There are 107,000 students in 170 regional schools across the state and this funding helps to assure they receive other critical services.”

Ellen Holmes, Chair of the Massachusetts Association of School Committees, had this to say, “Anne’s advocacy for Regional School District issues has been greatly appreciated. The unanimous support in the Senate today for her Regional School Transportation reimbursement amendment moves us closer to the legislative promise to the voters in these regions. We look forward to the members of the Senate Conference Committee working with the House to secure this essential funding.”

“Regional school transportation costs represent a significant portion of the Wachusett Regional School District’s annual budget,” said Margaret Natowicz, Rutland Town Administrator. “The state’s year-on-year regional transportation reimbursement underfunding has resulted in increased assessments to member communities. If funded, Senator Gobi’s amendment to increase regional transportation reimbursements from 68% to 80% would provide much needed relief to the Town of Rutland and other municipalities challenged with sustaining an array of public services. We express our sincere appreciation to the Senator for her tireless work to assure that the state allots its committed share of aid to municipalities and school districts.

State Auditor Suzanne Bump released a study on October 18, 2017 making recommendations to modernize laws and regulations within the regional school district structure. The report made sure to point at that state laws passed in 1949 entitle regional school districts to full reimbursement for school transportation expenses, but this is subject to annual appropriation. In fiscal 2016, the reimbursement rate from the state was just 73 percent, the auditor reported, creating a collective shortfall of \$14.4 million in this category for regional districts.

Regional school districts often have higher student transportation costs since they cover larger geographic regions. There are currently 58 regional school districts in Massachusetts with 171 member schools. The transportation money that is not reimbursed by the state comes directly out of their school budgets. Senator Gobi has advocated each year for an increase in funding with a goal of 100% reimbursement.

The House of Representatives approved \$63,521,000 and the two amounts will be negotiated by the conference committee.

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