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CONTACT:

Derek Silver, Office of State Senator Anne Gobi

Derek.Silver@MASenate.gov

617-722-1540

Bill Passed to Preserve Municipal Governance During Ongoing COVID-19 Crisis

BOSTON (June 8, 2020) – Governor Baker has signed a bill passed by the Massachusetts State Senate and Massachusetts House of Representatives last Thursday, to provide governance and fiscal flexibility for many municipalities grappling with public health challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic.

“Our local partners and municipalities require flexibility and assistance if they’re going to continue serving residents to their full extent without delay,” **commented Senator Anne Gobi (D-Spencer)**. “I am glad the Governor acted swiftly to pass this into law, and I applaud the work of my colleagues for working effectively to meet the needs of our local governments.”

Building off of other legislation that gave municipalities operating flexibility during the ongoing COVID-19 public health crisis, the bill further protects public health and preserves the town meeting structure from continued disruptions caused by the state of emergency.

The bill includes the following provisions:

- Permits representative town meeting to take place virtually;
- Permits quorum reduction for open town meeting to no less than 10% and extends the quorum reduction to representative town meeting;
- Allows town meeting to be held outside the geographic limits of the town; and
- Permits a municipal election scheduled through June 31 to be extended to August 1 at the latest.

By providing our municipalities with this much-needed flexibility, the bill preserves public access to the proceedings of town governance and protects the public from the continued health risks associated with the COVID-19 outbreak.

The bill also provides our city governments with fiscal relief by allowing mayors to delay their normal budget submission deadline for FY 2021 in light of the state of emergency.

Finally, among other provisions, the bill strengthens the prohibition on terminating essential services for residents during the COVID-19 emergency and provides municipalities and regional school districts flexibility in paying school bus and other vendor contracts.

For more information on the bill, please contact Senator Gobi's office at (617) 722-1540.

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