

COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS  
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## **PRESS RELEASE**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

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### **Gobi, Colleagues Pass Statewide FY15 Budget** Budget Now Awaits Senate and Governor's Approval

**(Boston)** – Representative Anne M. Gobi (D-Spencer) joined her colleagues on Monday to pass the Statewide FY15 budget. The budget was released from conference committee late Sunday night. The spending bill addresses major issues around the state concerning substance abuse, the Department of Children and Families and a lack of mental health resources. The budget invests in our future, increasing funding for education on all levels.

News headlines have been more or less dominated by the growing opiate epidemic in Massachusetts. The Legislature has responded by including close to \$18 million in new spending to curb substance abuse. These funds include the Substance Abuse Services Trust Fund, which will provide the Bureau of Substance Abuse Services with flexible resources that will be used to expand the range of treatment services, from initial detox to inpatient residential to medication and counseling. The funding will also go towards expanding existing Narcan pilot sites and providing additional resources for the Prescription Monitoring Program, allowing Physician Assistants and Advanced Practice Registered Nurses to participate in the program so that all prescribers are included. The FY15 budget will also require the Department of Public Health to establish a toll-free helpline and website that will inform callers on acute treatment facilities and transitional support service facilities that have open beds. The bill will also come down hard on Heroin Trafficking, increasing the maximum penalty from 20 years to 30 years.

The FY15 budget made Environment a priority, due in large part to the advocacy of Rep. Gobi, who is the Chair of the Joint Committee on Environment, Natural Resources and Agriculture. Funding will be provided for seasonal staffing, state parks, the office of dam safety and watershed management. The Hazardous Waste Cleanup Program sees an increase of \$333,000 for a total of \$13.9 million along with \$500,000 in funding for recycling. The Legislature included \$6 million for the Division of Marine Fisheries as well as a Water

Supply Protection Program to promote the safety and purity of the Commonwealth's water supplies and the protection of watershed lands. New changes to the APR program will allow for an appeal process for adverse decisions of the Department of Agricultural Resources on permitted use of the land before the agricultural lands preservation committee. Funding for the 4-H program as well as the apiary inspection program was included in the final version in the budget. Both pieces were budget amendments filed by Rep. Gobi.

Representative Gobi was also essential in the push for many of the local projects that were approved. Funding was included to install safety improvements in the historic Winchendon town hall. The funds will make the building completely handicap accessible. Other local projects include \$3 million for a public safety building in Barre, \$100,000 for updated software at the New Braintree dispatch center, \$1 million for capital improvements to the North Brookfield Town Hall, \$185,000 for the Citizen Soldier Memorial in Spencer, \$85,000 for playground improvements in Templeton and funding for the veterans' cemetery in Winchendon. "I was glad to advocate for statewide and local initiatives that benefit our region," said Rep. Gobi. "I appreciate the support I received in order to move forward important initiatives such as the Bay Path-Tufts collaboration that will help students and decrease costs for town."

Representative Gobi was also able to include funding in the budget for the Bay Path/Tufts University Pilot Project Feasibility Study. For students in Central Massachusetts who are interested in entering agricultural studies, options are limited and travelling can be expensive. One student attending an out of district agricultural school cost the town \$45,000 in transportation. The language included in the budget creates a study of the feasibility of a pilot project between Bay Path Regional Vocational Technical High School and the Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine at Tufts University conducted by the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission. This project would not only benefit the students at Bay Path but would save the school district money on transportation costs.

Another important issue that this budget addresses is the recent shortcomings of the Department of Children and Families. The Legislature has invested \$185.6 million for DCF Social workers, providing the department with the resources necessary to work toward the 15:1 case-to-caseworker ratio. Within the first 9 months of employment, DCF social workers will be required to obtain a social worker license and take part in increased training. DCF will also be experiencing upgrades to their communications and information technology in addition to their recordkeeping practices. Foster parents will also be required to provide fingerprints with their background check and all children entering the care of the department be seen by a licensed medical professional within 72 hours. Potential foster parents will be prohibited if they have been convicted of serious crimes, including crimes involving violence, child abuse or neglect, spousal abuse, and crimes against children. Representative Gobi signed on to a letter suggesting changes be made at the Department.

The House of Representatives also made education a main priority of this year's budget. The bill includes \$257.5 million for the Special Education Circuit Breaker, ensuring full funding for the third consecutive year. \$70.3 million will be provided for Regional School Transportation reimbursements of 90%, the highest percentage in the program's history. The budget will also provide \$4.4 billion in Chapter 70 funding ensuring that all school districts reach their Foundation Budget level while also providing directed increases in aid to communities who do not yet receive their target levels of state aid. The bill also provides \$15 million for early education access for low income children. Higher education also sees a boost in funding, with \$519 million allocated to UMass making sure that tuition and fees do not increase, keeping a college education affordable for Massachusetts residents.

The bill now sits on the Governor's desk awaiting his review and approval.

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