

June 20, 2023

Representative Aaron Michlewitz, Chair
House Committee on Ways and Means
State House, Room 243
Boston, MA 02133

Senator Michael Rodrigues, Chair
Senate Committee on Ways and Means
State House, Room 212
Boston, MA 02133

Representative Ann-Margaret Ferrante, Vice Chair
House Committee on Ways and Means
State House, Room 238
Boston, MA 02133

Senator Cindy Friedman, Vice Chair
Senate Committee on Ways and Means
State House, Room 313
Boston, MA 02133

Representative Todd Smola, Ranking Minority
House Committee on Ways and Means
State House, Room 124
Boston, MA 02133

Senator Patrick O'Connor, Ranking Minority
Senate Committee on Ways and Means
State House, Room 419
Boston MA 02133

Dear FY24 Conference Committee Members,

On behalf of the Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce and our 1,200 members, I would like to thank you and your staff for your diligent and thoughtful efforts in developing the state's FY24 budget. As you proceed to conference committee negotiations, I write to share the Chamber's priorities.

Transportation

STRONG SUPPORT: Mobility Pricing Commission (Senate § 79)

In previous sessions, both branches supported a new Mobility Pricing Commission to study long-term transportation financing options for the Commonwealth. The Chamber appreciates that support and urges the Legislature to adopt the measure and send it to the Governor for signature once again.

Similar to language the House and Senate both adopted in 2020 and 2022, this commission will evaluate a variety of mobility pricing scenarios and present options for consideration to policymakers to ensure the transportation network receives adequate funding to improve safety and reliability for residents. The discussion is urgently needed to ensure stable and reliable transportation funding in the years ahead when gas tax revenues decline and eventually disappear.

The Chamber encourages the Legislature to adopt this provision with no changes because to be successful, the commission membership and scope must be balanced and neutral to policy outcomes. The commission's outcomes should not be predetermined and instead allow for innovative and open dialogue on possible policy options. The language as adopted by the Senate reflects both branches' substantive work on this issue and is balanced. We also urge the Legislature to allocate \$2 million in funding to support the activities and research of the commission.

SUPPORT: MBTA Board Seat for the City of Boston (House § 27)

The Chamber supports creating a seat on the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority Board of Directors (MBTA Board) that is appointed by the Mayor of Boston. Given the significant portion of the T that runs through the City of Boston and the city's large financial contribution to the system, Boston should have a designated seat on the MBTA board.

SUPPORT: MBTA Capital Investments (Item 1596-2404 - \$250M)

We urge the conference committee to allocate \$250 million to a system in desperate need of safety and reliability upgrades. Both budgets include necessary investments in the MBTA system by dedicating significant resources to capital improvements and signal work. While the MBTA needs organizational and culture changes in wake of poor service and historic safety problems, this appropriate use of income surtax funds will help the MBTA begin to address critical infrastructure issues and encourage increased ridership.

SUPPORT: MBTA Workforce and Safety Reserve (Item 1596-2427 - \$65M)

The Chamber urges the Legislature to support funding for the MBTA's Workforce and Safety Reserve. The House budget includes \$65 million for a MBTA Workforce and Safety reserve to address the specific safety and workforce shortcomings identified by the Federal Transit Administration in 2022. The MBTA must address these significant failures immediately by diligently deploying these funds for staffing and other important needs to increase confidence in the system.

Business Climate

SUPPORT: Early Education and Care Stabilization Grants (Item 3000-1045)

The Chamber encourages the Legislature to support additional investment in EEC Stabilization Grants. Access to affordable, high quality early education and care programs helps attract and retain talent in Massachusetts. Stabilization grants will provide these programs vital financial support as they face continuing difficulties resulting from the pandemic and a tight labor market in 2023. These resources not only support the early education and care workforce, but the workforce of all employers with continued access to childcare options.

SUPPORT: High Demand Scholarship Program (House § 7)

The Chamber supports a high demand targeted scholarship program to address the challenging labor market, ensure equitable opportunities to access in-demand careers, and increase regional competitiveness for the Commonwealth. As employers continue to face worker shortages across many industries, this targeted scholarship program incentivizes students in the Commonwealth to pursue educational pathways that employers need. Critically, including wraparound services also provides students with additional support to improve educational outcomes and help students successfully earn certificates and degrees. This program also ensures Massachusetts employers have access to qualified talent in high-demand industries by requiring students earning scholarships to remain in Massachusetts for five years after completing their programs.

SUPPORT: Higher Education COVID-19 Limited Liability (Senate § 57)

The Chamber encourages the Legislature to adopt civil liability protections for colleges and universities for claims arising out of the pandemic. Higher education institutions in Massachusetts confronted significant challenges in the spring of 2020 due to the outbreak of COVID-19. Acting in collaboration with the Commonwealth's public health agencies, colleges and universities took the necessary steps to protect students' health and wellbeing and comply with emergency orders. However, many of these institutions now face civil claims seeking tuition reimbursement related to the disruptions from the state's public health emergency.

The Chamber supports Section 57 of the Senate's FY24 budget that extends limited civil liability protection for these claims after colleges and universities were required to temporarily transition to remote instruction by the state. This protection should extend retroactively to all existing cases stemming from the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic to allow these institutions to provide high-quality education to the state's future workforce.

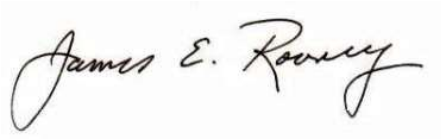
Climate & Energy

SUPPORT Clean Energy Investment Fund (Item 1595-6232 - \$25M)

The Chamber supports additional investments in the clean energy workforce as the Commonwealth adopts new sources of renewable energy and strives to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions. Massachusetts is at the forefront of clean energy policy and offshore wind, solar, and other clean energy technologies will create new jobs. These industries need access to a talented and trained workforce as the state moves from planning to implementing clean energy projects and related necessary infrastructure improvements.

Please do not hesitate to reach out with any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,



James E. Rooney
President and CEO