Baker-Polito Administration Files Legislation to Address Challenges Faced by Municipalities, School Districts During COVID-19 Outbreak

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- Office of Governor Charlie Baker and Lt. Governor Karyn Polito
- Governor's Press Office
- Executive Office for Administration and Finance
- Department of Public Health

BOSTON — Today, the Baker-Polito Administration filed *An Act to Further Address Challenges Faced by Municipalities and School Districts Resulting from COVID-19,*which would provide administrative relief to state and local government entities impacted by the ongoing **COVID-19 outbreak**, including modifying local permitting processes, enabling municipalities to extend tax and finance deadlines, and extending deadlines for certain education requirements.

Full details on proposed changes in the legislation include:

- Suspending the cap on hours and compensation for retired employees collecting a pension for hours worked during the state of emergency, allowing municipalities to tap qualified workers when their workforces might be disrupted.
- Permitting establishments licensed to sell alcohol for on-premises consumption to sell wine and beer by take-out and delivery, provided that the wine or beer is sold in the

original sealed container, is sold in the same transaction as a purchase of food and is not over certain volume limitations.

- Modifying the local permitting process during the **state of emergency** by:
    - Providing that no permit is automatically granted, approved, or denied because a local permitting authority is unable to act within a time period required by law.
    - Providing that any permit that is currently valid will not lapse or expire during the state of emergency and suspends any time limitation on such permits during the emergency.
    - Allowing applications for permits to be filed electronically, to eliminate the need for in-person filing.
    - Suspending any requirement that a hearing on a permit application be held within a certain period until 45 days after the end of the state of emergency
- Extending municipal tax deadlines by allowing municipalities to waive late-payment penalties for 4th quarter tax bills, which are due May 1. In addition, municipalities could change their tax bill due date from April 1 to June 1.
- Allowing municipalities to extend the deadline for property tax exemptions and deferrals. The current statutory deadline is April 1, and this would allow municipalities to extend it to June 1.
- Permitting Regional School Districts to suspend the statutorily-required vote on the approval of their fiscal year 2021 budget and allowing the Department of Elementary

and Secondary Education to certify an amount sufficient for the operation of the district, until a budget can be adopted.

- Modifying the MCAS by permitting the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education upon recommendation of the Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education to modify or waive the required competency determination for high school graduation. The Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education would also be allowed to modify or waive the MCAS testing requirement.

- Extending a Student Opportunity Act deadline by permitting the Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education to extend the April 1, 2020 deadline for each district to submit its first 3-year plan to address "persistent disparities in achievement among student subgroups."

- Permitting electronic signatures for search warrants and criminal complaints. Allowing electronic signatures in these situations would result in less traffic in courthouses and reduce in-person encounters, while still allowing the criminal process to continue.

- Extending the dates by which the MBTA must approve a preliminary budget and submit a final budget to better align with the Commonwealth's budget process.

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