



Action for Public Health

101 Tremont St., Suite 1011 • Boston, MA 02108 • TEL: (857) 263-7072 • FAX: (857) 263-7068 • www.mphaweb.org

Steven Bradley, *President*

Toby Fisher, *Executive Director*

June 4, 2013

Re: Public Health Priorities – Conference Committee Budget

Dear Conference Committee members:

On behalf of the Massachusetts Public Health Association (MPHA), we would like to thank you for your careful consideration and attention to core public health needs in the FY14 state budget. Effective public health programs prevent disease and injury before they occur, protecting health, productivity, and learning, while reducing healthcare costs.

We appreciate your leadership in protecting funding for many programs even as the state budget remains tight, and we are pleased that the Legislature recognizes the importance of public health for every resident in the Commonwealth. We are particularly appreciative of increased funding proposed for the Board of Registration in Pharmacy in both the House and Senate budgets to ensure that the Commonwealth can employ a sufficient number of pharmacy inspectors to provide proper safeguards.

In order to maintain a strong public health system in the Commonwealth, we urge you to support the following budget priorities:

- 1. Adopt SENATE funding for Environmental Public Health Services (4510-0600) at \$4,391,414 and adopt HOUSE funding for Food Protection Retained Revenue (4510-0020) at \$233,203.** The Bureau of Environmental Health safeguards many of the most basic structures we rely on daily—the quality of the air we breathe, safety of the food we eat, cleanliness of the water we drink, and minimization of harmful exposures including pesticides and radiation. These programs—cut by 18% since FY09—have been chronically underfunded.

Cuts over the last several years have led to the elimination of more than 50% of the *food inspectors* who conduct inspections of food manufacturers and wholesale establishments, a staffing level that is half of the federal FDA performance standard. Cuts have also led to significant backlog of requests for *indoor air quality assessments* at elementary and middle schools, as well as other public facilities with potentially-dangerous air quality due to mold and other contaminants. There is typically a backlog of several dozen requests from across the state. The Senate level of funding would allow for the hiring of 16.5 FTEs to ensure that these essential safeguards are in place.

The *Food Protection Retained Revenue* account – zeroed out in the Senate budget - allows DPH to retain inspectional fees from the food protection program in order to respond to new state and federal laws aimed at enhancing food safety.

- 2. Adopt SENATE funding for Health Care Safety and Quality (4510-0710) at \$7,826,326.** The Bureau of Health Care Safety and Quality is central to the state's goal of promoting health care cost containment and high quality care. Budget cuts have left serious gaps in

capacity to inspect, license, and respond to complaints at health care facilities. DPH currently licenses more than 6,000 health care facilities and handles approximately 14,000 consumer complaints each year. There is currently a 5 month backlog of complaints, which can jeopardize patient safety and result in uncoordinated inspections in which investigators are unaware of pending complaints against facilities. The Senate funding level would allow for the hiring of 8 additional staff to provide increased inspectional and enforcement capacity.

- 3. Adopt HOUSE base funding for Department of Public Health Critical Operations and Essential Services (4510-0100) at \$18,474,624.** This line item supports critical DPH services, including emergency preparedness, environmental health assessments, implementation and enforcement of regulations, reducing disparities in health care, and monitoring and inspections of nursing homes, food safety, and water quality. Additional capacity is needed to address the development and enforcement of legally mandated public health regulations, including new regulatory responsibilities for pharmacies and health professionals. MPHA supports the inclusion of the dedicated funding of for the Catastrophic Illness in Children Relief Fund, as included in the Senate budget, but we urge that this funding be provided on top of adequate base funding.

- 4. Adopt SENATE language for the Childhood Vaccine Program (section 83A of S1800).** This language will codify an existing and cost-saving financing mechanism for routine childhood vaccinations. Massachusetts insurers currently pay an assessment for the cost of state-supplied childhood vaccines at the reduced purchase price the state receives under federal contract. This financing system has been successfully implemented via state budget language for FY10-FY12, saving the Commonwealth nearly \$50 million in FY' 11 alone.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. If we can be helpful in any way, please do not hesitate to contact Maddie Ribble at 857-263-7072 x111 or mribble@mphaweb.org.

Sincerely,



Toby Fisher
Executive Director



Maddie Ribble
Director of Policy and Communications