

MPHA Statement on Governor Baker's FY2016 Budget Proposal

March 6, 2015

On Wednesday, March 4th, Governor Baker released his first state budget proposal, offering a glimpse into his priorities and approach to governing. Baker is faced with tough choices to address a budget deficit for next fiscal year estimated at \$1.5 billion.

MPHA is pleased with several policy provisions included in the budget, including an increase in the Earned Income Tax Credit and the creation of a new End Family Homelessness Fund. We are also happy to see current funding levels maintained for important violence prevention and smoking cessation programs.

However, we are deeply concerned about proposed cuts to public health infrastructure programs and HIV/AIDS services. Funding for DPH community-based programs would be cut by a total of roughly \$12 million or about 4% from current funding. This would result in the elimination of more than 100 FTEs and would have a major impact on services and basic protections. The proposed funding reductions would bring the total cuts since fiscal year 2009 to more than \$82 million. The Governor's budget proposes significant cuts to infrastructure including Food Protection, the State Public Health Laboratory, Environmental Public Health Services, and DPH Critical Operations. These line items support protections that we all depend on for safe food, air, and water, as well as prevention and response to communicable disease.

Read on for additional details and to learn how you can support adequate public health funding.

THE GOOD NEWS

We are pleased that Governor Baker proposes to double the state match to the **Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC)**. The EITC is an effective anti-poverty program and has been shown to improve health outcomes. (Read recent coverage in the Boston Globe [here](#).)

We are also happy to see that the budget proposal includes a focus on homelessness through the creation a new **End Family Homelessness Reserve Fund** to address homelessness prevention.

Funding for violence prevention programs is protected, including:

- **Youth Violence Prevention (4590-1506)** is maintained at \$1.3m - funding for programs using a positive youth development approach to reduce youth violence.
- **Youth at Risk Grants (4590-1507)** is maintained at \$4.1m - grants for YMCAs, YWCAs, Boys and Girls Clubs, and other programs that support youth at risk, including gang involved youth,

youth with disabilities, GLBTQ youth, and homeless or state-involved youth.

- **Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Prevention and Treatment (4513-1130)** is funded at \$5.7m - includes funding for crisis intervention, legal and medical advocacy, support groups and outreach.

Smoking Prevention and Cessation Programs (4590-0300) are maintained at \$3.9m - funding for youth prevention, retailer enforcement and compliance checks, cessation services

THE BAD NEWS

The Governor's budget proposal includes significant cuts to public health infrastructure, undermining basic protections that all residents of the Commonwealth depend on. These cuts would roll back the limited progress that has been made in the last two years to rebuild programs devastated in previous years' recession budgets. Proposed cuts include:

- **State Laboratory and Communicable Disease Control (4516-1000)** is cut by \$1.3m (9%) – the State Public Health Laboratory is crucial to the health of Massachusetts residents and supports local health departments in every city and town. It is responsible for testing, monitoring disease reporting, investigation of and response to disease outbreaks, and helping local health departments respond to communicable disease threats.
- **Environmental Public Health Services (4510-0600)** is cut by \$205,000 (5%) - safeguards many of the most basic structures we rely on daily—protecting all Massachusetts residents from hazardous exposures and environmentally-induced illness. Programs include food safety, radiation control, water and air quality testing, and medical waste disposal, among others.
- **Health Care Quality and Improvement (4510-0710)** is cut by \$868,000 (8%) - central to the state's goal of promoting health care cost containment and high quality care, goals which are threatened by limited resources.
- **Critical Operations and Essential Services (4510-0100)** is cut by \$1m (6%) - support for critical DPH services and staff across the department, including emergency preparedness, environmental health assessments, implementation and enforcement of regulations, reducing disparities in health care, inspections of nursing homes, food safety, and water quality.

Funding for **HIV/AIDS Prevention, Treatment and Services (4512-0103)** is cut \$2.3m (7%). These cuts are expected to have a devastating impact on the ability of service providers to meet the needs of people impacted by HIV/AIDS and will disproportionately affect the state's most vulnerable populations. (Click [here](#) for more information from the AIDS Action Committee of Massachusetts.)

TO WATCH – MASSHEALTH CHANGES

There is some good news on the MassHealth front, where the Governor proposes an extension of

coverage for dentures and expansion of services available to children with autism. Observers will be carefully following the Administration's plans to achieve \$750 million in savings from reforms to MassHealth. Outside of an elimination of coverage for chiropractic services, the Administration states that they do not intend to reduce coverage or eligibility. Rather, the Administration plans to redetermine eligibility for each of the 1.2 million residents currently on MassHealth, a process they estimate will save \$200 million. Additional savings would be gained by pushing off some payments until the following fiscal year. (To learn more, read the statement from Health Care For All [here](#), and coverage from the Boston Globe [here](#).)

NEXT STEPS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR ACTION

The budget process moves on now to the House of Representatives. The House Ways and Means Committee will be developing their budget proposal over the next six weeks, and the full House will debate the budget in late April. MPHA will be working hard to advocate for adequate public health funding, including protecting dedicated funding for the Mass in Motion program we won in last year's budget as well as securing funding for the [Massachusetts Food Trust Program](#).

We need your voice! Stay tuned in the next week as we release our complete list of House funding priorities and more about how you can get involved to speak up for public health in the state budget.

For more information, contact MPHA Director of Policy and Communications, Maddie Ribble, at mribble@mphaweb.org.