

Town of Franklin

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OFFICE OF THE TOWN ADMINISTRATOR

June 15, 2020

US Senator Elizabeth Warren
309 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

US Senator Ed Markey
255 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Warren & Senator Markey:

We, the undersigned members of the Town of Franklin, write to thank you for your work to date to aid the Commonwealth during the COVID-19 crisis. We would also like to take this opportunity to highlight our priorities for future congressional action to help Massachusetts address the ongoing public health and economic challenges we face.

First and foremost, we are extremely grateful for your work on each of the four pieces of federal legislation that have provided over \$2 trillion in support of the public health preparation and response to COVID-19, as well as to help states, municipalities and citizens contend with the economic fallout of this crisis. Notably, expansions to unemployment compensation, prioritization of the needs of small businesses, and direct financial assistance to healthcare providers and our education system have been, and will continue to be, essential to our response.

Additional assistance from the federal government is necessary, however, if Massachusetts is to weather this crisis in a manner that: maintains the services residents rely on; protects the health, education and other facilities that undergird our society; and strengthens the infrastructure of our economy—like child care—that we often take for granted.

We write in strong support of a number of provisions included in the HEROES Act, which was passed by the House of Representatives on Friday, May 15, 2020. While the HEROES Act covers a wide range of topics deserving of consideration, this letter focuses on elements of the bill that provide critical federal financial support for Massachusetts and its residents.

\$750 billion in state and local fiscal relief

The \$500 billion in state fiscal relief and \$250 billion in local fiscal relief proposed in the HEROES Act is crucial for states and municipalities to meet the dual challenge of increased demand on services and steep declines in revenue collections.

A recent economic summit, convened by state budget writers, to examine the impact of COVID-19 on our state finances projected tax revenue losses of up to \$6 billion in fiscal year 2021. Although Massachusetts has built up the third largest stabilization fund in the nation, without the significant fiscal relief proposed in the HEROES Act, Massachusetts will not be able to balance its budget without major reductions that would undercut our ability to meet the needs of residents during this crisis.

We also strongly support the extension and enhancement of federal Medicaid reimbursements. The HEROES Act proposes an additional 14 percentage point reimbursement for Medicaid expenditures in state fiscal year 2021; this enhancement would provide much-needed budget relief to a strained health care budget. In addition to these items included in the House legislation, we ask consideration of two further policy changes: the easing of restrictions on Coronavirus Relief Funds to enable more flexible use; and the elimination of cost-sharing requirements for federal FEMA reimbursements.

\$100.15 billion for K-12 and higher education

COVID-19 has forced K-12 and higher education institutions to rethink and adjust every aspect of their operations. These changes have presented enormous short-term financial and logistical challenges and, without action, could endanger the long-term viability of many institutions. The HEROES Act takes a significant step towards addressing these short- and long-term issues by providing \$100.15 billion for the state fiscal stabilization fund. We strongly support recapitalizing this fund, which was so critical to allowing Massachusetts to avoid making K-12 education cuts during the Great Recession.

\$7 billion for the Child Care Development Block Grant and expansions to childcare tax credits


The role that affordable and accessible childcare plays in our economy has never been clearer, at a time when the challenges facing that industry have never been greater. Our ability to return to work hinges on the ability of childcare providers to safely reopen. This requires a range of funding sources to make up for months of lost revenue, pay workers sufficient wages to return to a safe workplace, and adapt to a new normal which can no longer be based on a full-enrollment financing model. We applaud the inclusion of \$7 billion in supplemental funding for the Child Care Development Block Grant in the HEROES Act and will continue to advocate for additional federal support.

Reducing the cost of childcare for working families is just as important as addressing the financial needs of providers, and so we are pleased to see that the HEROES Act does this by increasing both the amount of the child and dependent care tax credit and expanding eligibility. These changes will be instrumental in enabling thousands of families in the state to return to work.

A solid state-federal partnership is required to confront the public health and economic challenges we face, and we are fortunate to have such a strong relationship with our delegation. Your contributions to legislation thus far have been crucial for our ongoing response efforts, but further action is needed.

We urge you to act quickly to finalize a second major COVID-19 response bill which includes the provisions of the HEROES Act highlighted in this letter. The ability of Congress to act quickly to support the priorities outlined in this letter, as well as other pressing needs, will be pivotal as we begin to create a 'new normal' for Massachusetts.

Thank you for your continued advocacy on our behalf.



Jamie Hellen, Town Administrator
Town of Franklin



Dr. Sara Ahern, Superintendent of Schools
Franklin Public Schools

CC: Senate President Karen Spilka
Puja Mehta, District Director, Senator Karen Spilka
Senator Rebecca Rausch
Representative Jeffrey Roy
Congressman Joseph Kennedy III
Lisa Nelson, District Director, Office of Congressman Joseph P. Kennedy III
Franklin Town Council
Franklin School Committee
Franklin Finance Committee