



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

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Representative Barrows supports legislation to address local and regional public health disparities

BOSTON – State Representative F. Jay Barrows (R-Mansfield) recently supported legislation to establish minimum standards for the Commonwealth’s local and regional public health systems and promote more shared services between communities.

House Bill 5104, *An Act relative to accelerating improvements to the local and regional public health system to address disparities in the delivery of public health services*, was engrossed by the House of Representatives on a vote of 153-0 on July 28. Also known as SAPHE 2.0 (Statewide Accelerated Public Health for Every Community), the bill seeks to eliminate many of the inequities in health care service delivery that were exposed by the COVID-19 global pandemic.

According to Representative Barrows, the bill updates the Public Health Excellence Program, which was established in 2020 and is tasked with promoting adequate resources and support for local boards of health. The program is also responsible for developing standards for foundational public health services, covering diverse areas such as inspections; communicable disease investigations and reporting; environmental permitting; food and water protection; chronic disease and injury protection; and workforce education, training and credentialing.

Under the SAPHE 2.0 bill, the Department of Public Health (DPH) and the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) must provide comprehensive core public health educational and training opportunities to municipal and regional public health officials and staff, free of charge. DPH and DEP are also required to develop systems to standardize public health reporting and to measure the standard responsibilities of boards of health. DPH will provide estimates to the Secretary of Administration and Finance regarding the amount of funding necessary to meet these requirements for each fiscal year.

Representative Barrows said House Bill 5104 is a continuation of the work that began with the Legislature’s passage of the original SAPHE Act in April of 2020. That legislation grew out of the recommendations issued by the Special Commission on Local and Regional Public Health, which released *The Blueprint for Public Health Excellence* in June of 2019. House Bill 5104 revives this special commission, which will continue its work until December 31, 2023.

In December of 2020, as part of the Fiscal Year 2021 (FY21) state budget, the House and Senate created a new line item to provide grants to local and regional boards of health, which previously had not received direct state

funding. Initially funded at \$10 million, the line item was increased to \$15 million in both the FY22 and FY23 budgets.

Representative Barrows noted that the Legislature provided additional funding support in December of 2021, when it approved the use of \$200 million in federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) money, to be invested over a five-year period for local public health infrastructure.

House Bill 5104 now moves to the Senate for its consideration.

If you would like to contact the Office of Representative Barrows, you may call (617)-722-2100 to share any potential questions and concerns.