



Legislative Priorities for the 193rd Session of the Massachusetts Legislature – January 2024 Update

The Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP) Network is hosted by the Franklin Regional Council of Governments, and is made up of people who are interested in making our region a healthier, more equitable place to live, work, and play. The CHIP Network's vision is that all residents of Franklin County and the North Quabbin Region will have the opportunity to pursue healthy lifestyles, to participate in shaping the systems that affect their health, and to achieve social, emotional, physical, and spiritual well-being. Visit us online at www.frcog.org/chip

Where are we now? The legislative session ends at the end of July, with informal action still possible until 12/31/24. A new session will begin in January of 2025. In the meantime, there is an important deadline coming on 2/7, when all bills need to be reported out of their committees to stay “in play” for the rest of the session (note that some extensions are possible). Also posing a challenge for getting bills passed is the fact that the budget for FY25 will be considered first by the House (in April) and then by Senate (in May), taking up a lot of time and energy at the state house. For CHIP members who would like to see action on these bills in this session, find a quick update on each below:

Improving Our Regional Transit Authorities:

Bill Name: *An Act to increase regional transit accessibility in the Commonwealth* ([H.3272/S.2277](#)).

Sponsors: Senator Su Moran, Representative Natalie Blais

Summary: This bill addresses many of the challenges faced by regional transit authorities in the Commonwealth. It ensures adequate funding and adjustments for inflation, dedicates 50% of Uber/Lyft fees paid to the Commonwealth to support regional transit, improves the state Regional Transit Authority Council by adding seats for riders and requiring annual reporting, and eliminates profitability as a performance metric for transit agencies.

Status: Just had a hearing on 1/24/24. Watch it here: <https://malegislature.gov/Events/Hearings/Detail/4808>

Next Steps: Send in written testimony to the [Transportation Committee](#) until February 7, asking for support of the bill, and for it to be reported out of committee. Send a copy of your letter to your State Representative and State Senator as well.

Transforming Our Local Public Health System:

Bill Name: *An Act relative to accelerating improvements to the local and regional public health system to address disparities in the delivery of public health services (AKA SAPHE 2.0 Bill)* ([HB 4101](#))

Sponsors: Senator Jo Comerford, Representatives Hannah Kane and Denise Garlick.

Summary: This bill, which passed the House and Senate unanimously last session, builds on the lessons from the pandemic about the need for better, more equitable public health protections across the state. It will create regional equity by: (1) establishing state standards for local public health performance, guaranteeing everyone the same protection, regardless of zip code; (2) creating state workforce credentialing standards; (3) Increasing capacity at the local level by encouraging sharing of local public health services through state funding; and (4) Improving data collection and sharing through a uniform data collection and reporting system.

Status: Hearing held, new version of bill passed two committees, moved to Ways and Means Committee, which means it is ready to be voted on.

Next Steps: Write to members of House [Ways and Means Committee](#), as well as the [House Speaker](#), to request passage. Copy your Representative.

Allowing Spouses to be Compensated as Caregivers:

Bill Name: *An Act Allowing Spouses to Serve as Caregivers: (S.67/H.216)*

Sponsors: Senator Jo Comerford, Representatives Adam Scanlon, Norman Orrall

Summary: Addresses the urgent home health care crisis by allowing spouses to be compensated for caregiving through programs administered by Mass Health. Currently other family members are allowed to receive payment for caregiving, but not spouses.

Status: Hearing held – you can watch it here: <https://malegislature.gov/Events/Hearings/Detail/4739>. This bill may get added to a major Long Term Care bill.

Next Steps: letters supporting it and asking Senators to add it to the Long Term Care bill will be helpful. It was not included in the House version of the Long Term Care bill. If it is added, then it will be helpful to send letters or calls to Representatives to support accepting that addition in the Conference Committee convened to work out the differences between the two versions.

Providing High Quality Early Education:

Bill Name: *An Act providing affordable and accessible high quality early education and care to promote child development and well-being and support the economy in the Commonwealth. (S.301/H.489)*

Sponsors: Senator Jason Lewis, Representatives Kenneth Gordon & Adrian Madaro

Summary: This bill is part of a larger set of priorities known as the Common Start Agenda. It would provide financial support for families to access early childhood education, create a permanent mechanism to provide operating support for early childhood education providers, and improve the quality of early childhood education.

Status: Hearing was held. You can view it here: <https://malegislature.gov/Events/Hearings/Detail/4737>

Next Steps: Contact members of the [Education Committee](#), copying your own legislators, to ask for it to be reported favorably out of committee.

Improving Access to Affordable Housing

The Housing Bond Bill: We are excited about the introduction of the Housing Bond Bill. It will provide a comprehensive approach to addressing the housing needs of the Commonwealth through resources to produce and preserve affordable homes and public housing. The Housing Bond Bill will recapitalize programs that serve diverse populations, including working families, the elderly, people with disabilities, and those experiencing homelessness. However, as currently designed, it has major shortcomings for rural communities. We look forward to providing testimony to suggest important changes to ensure regional equity when the bill is heard.

Status: The Housing Bond bill had a hearing on 1/18/24. Watch it here (note, its 6+ hours!):

<https://malegislature.gov/Events/Hearings/Detail/4819>

Next Steps: Local legislators, the FRCOG and the Franklin Regional Housing and Redevelopment Authority, as part of the Western MA Housing Coalition, as well as the Rural Policy Advisory Commission, provided testimony about the ways in which the bill would need to change to support housing development in rural communities. [You can read about their requests here](#). Additional letters to [the Housing Committee](#) would be helpful.