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November 6, 2020

VIA EMAIL

The Honorable Jo Comerford,
Senate Chair, Joint Committee on Public Health
State House, Room 413-C
24 Beacon Street
Boston, MA 02133

Chair John Mahoney, House Committee on Public Health
House Chair, Joint Committee on Public Health
State House, Room 130
24 Beacon Street
Boston, MA 02133

RE: for H.5045/S.2922 An Act To Ensure Statewide Accelerated Public Health For Every Community –

Dear Chair Comerford and Chair Mahoney,

On behalf of the Massachusetts Taxpayers Foundation, and as a member of the Special Commission on Local and Regional Public Health, I write today to offer some brief comments on H.5045/S.2922. I thank you for allowing me the opportunity to provide public testimony on this important topic.

The Massachusetts Taxpayers Foundation is a non-partisan, nationally recognized, non-profit public policy research organization whose mission is to promote the long-term economic well-being of the Commonwealth by focusing on the state's fiscal and economic health. We have a long track record of providing independent, credible, and objective analysis on important issues facing the state.

Many of the provisions included in S.2922/H.5045 mirror the recommendations of the recently convened Special Commission on Local and Regional Public Health (established by Chapter 3 of the Resolves of 2016). The charge of the Commission was to assess the effectiveness and efficiency of municipal and regional public health systems and to make recommendations regarding how to strengthen the delivery of public health services and preventive measures. This 25 member body represented a broad array of stakeholders representing different perspectives, areas of expertise and experiences. The diverse makeup of the commission led to careful, thoughtful and comprehensive deliberations over the almost two year period we convened.

At its best, public health is a vital public service, one which can reduce healthcare costs, improve the health and extend the lives of residents of Massachusetts and make our communities safer. The current pandemic has served to heighten our awareness of its importance.

However, we know that our current public system is not functioning optimally or uniformly across the municipalities of our state. Recognizing these shortfalls, the Special Commission on Local and Regional Public Health offered recommendations that bridge the gap between the our current public health system and what we aspire to have.

The recommendations focused around five key areas:

1. Elevate the performance standards of local public health departments.
2. Delivering services efficiently and effectively by designing local public system in a way that encourages cross-jurisdictional sharing of public health services to strengthen the service delivery capabilities of local public health departments, take advantage of economies of scale, and coordinate planning
3. Establishing education and training standards for local public health officials and staff and expanding access to professional development.
4. Having the DPH collect data from all local public health departments in a standardized format to allow for the creation of metrics to evaluate performance over time.
5. Commit resources that will be necessary to meet the minimum set of local public health services.

S.2922/H.5045 incorporates these recommendations and will improve our public health system by reducing the wide variation that exists among municipalities in the size and scope of public health services offered. We do not want a zip code to determine the type and quality of public services available in our Commonwealth.

While it may not be feasible to offer each municipality more money in these challenging fiscal times, providing grants will allow for targeted investments. It is also worth exploring ways to incent adoption of, and adherence to, standards through local aid, community compact and other such programs.

Strengthening our local public health system is a goal to which MTF remains committed. I urge you to report H.5045/S.2922 favorably out of this committee as an important incremental next step.

Thank you for the ability to submit testimony, please reach out with any questions.

Sincerely,



Eileen McAnney
President