

February 2015

Boston's 2015-2016 Legislative Agenda 2

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A review of selected bills submitted by the City of Boston in four policy areas.

As Part 2 of a review of selected bills in the Mayor's legislative package for the 2015-2016 session of the Massachusetts General Court, five bills in the areas of economic development, education, transportation, and government efficiency are highlighted.

Economic Development

- A bill that would provide more discretion for the City to optimize and reorganize the business licensing process as it sees fit. The City could be able to streamline the process of applying for different business licenses in the City of Boston and eliminate specialty licenses for specific niches, such as billiard tables and bowling alleys. One notable part of this bill is that it would allow restaurants and bars to remain open past 2:00 A.M.

Education

- A bill that would require state funding to keep pace with the true cost of special education services provided by school districts. The bill would authorize districts to include the actual number of students with learning disabilities enrolled into the Chapter 70 formula rather than be capped at 3.75% of total students as it is now. The bill would also provide that the Circuit Breaker reimbursement for students with more severe special needs would be 75% of costs above three times the average pupil's costs instead of the current four times the average cost.

Government Efficiency

- A home rule petition to eliminate a reserve requirement in the School Department budget that is an administrative nightmare. This 1986 law requires a reserve fund of up to 2.5% of the Department's current fiscal year's appropriation from which no expense can be made before May 1 in the fiscal year. Because the reserve is created from existing budget accounts planned for other specific purposes rather than as a segregated reserve, the reserve does not provide additional funds to cover unanticipated expenses. The reserve serves no practical purpose and its elimination would improve the management of the School Department budget.
- A bill that would allow Boston voters to sign nomination papers for as many candidates for Mayor or City Council as they would like. Boston voters currently can only sign the nomination papers of one candidate for Mayor, one candidate for their District City Councilor seat, and four candidates for the four At-Large City Council seats.

Transportation

- A bill adding one seat to the Board of Directors of both Massport and MassDOT with each seat to be filled by appointment of the Mayor of Boston.