



Kenneth I. Gordon
Massachusetts General Court

August 3, 2020

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
(Gordon)

CONTACT: Cody Case, 617-722-2575

Rep. Gordon Helps Pass Flurry of Late-Session Bills to Bolster Economy, Health Care, and Clean Energy; Secures Funding Authority for Burlington

BOSTON (8/3/2020) – Representative Ken Gordon (D - Bedford) and his colleagues in the House of Representatives concluded a busy last week of traditional formal session by passing three major bills aimed at bolstering the economy, addressing the healthcare challenge brought on by COVID-19, and combatting climate change.

“Each of the bills addresses critically important issues in the midst of this global crisis,” said Rep. Gordon. “Our economic development bill provides assistance to those whose families, livelihoods, and even housing security have been impacted by the pandemic. The health care reform bill removes many barriers to telehealth and COVID-19 testing and care. Finally, a long-awaited climate bill brings us one step forward in addressing the impacts to climate change.”

The Senate has passed similar legislation on the same topics, and each matter will be addressed by a conference committee made up of members of the House and Senate. If, as expected, they reach a compromise between their approaches, and the compromise is accepted by both branches, the matters will be sent to the Governor for his signature.

The House’s economic development package tackles issues ranging from housing to sports wagering and includes measures to assist businesses impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The bill:

- Promotes housing production by allowing municipalities to approve certain zoning changes by a simple majority vote, rather than requiring a two-thirds supermajority;
- Legalizes in-person and mobile betting on professional and Division 1 college sports. A portion of the revenue generated by the sports betting would help to alleviate the economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic;

- Establishes a Distressed Restaurant Trust Fund, which would provide restaurants that have been financially impacted by the COVID-19 emergency with up to \$15,000 in assistance. This one-time grant may be used to cover rent, mortgages, payroll, and a number of other expenses. Thirty percent of the revenue generated by legalized sports wagering would be deposited into this fund; and
- Includes \$456 million in bond authorizations to support nonprofits and cultural organizations, fund loans for small business, and local projects.

In addition, Rep. Gordon secured a \$1 million bond authorization to be shared between Burlington and Bedford to prepare unleased, pre-permitted commercial space for the life science industry, to allow the towns to convert underutilized spaces for future development; and a \$250,000 bond authorization to support a small manufacturer's makerspace at Northeastern University's Technology Research Center in Burlington

Like the economic development legislation, the health care reform bill responds to the public's changing needs during the current public health crisis. The bill:

- Requires insurers to cover telehealth visits for primary care and chronic disease management at the same rate as in-person services for one year;
- Permanently mandates that insurers cover behavioral telehealth services at the same rate as in-person care;
- Directs monthly payments to eligible community hospitals;
- Expands insurance coverage of COVID-19 tests and other services related to the care of COVID-19 patients; and
- Includes several provisions support nursing homes and elder care providers.

On Friday, the House passed an important piece of legislation aimed at combatting climate change. This bill takes a comprehensive approach to clean energy production and development by:

- Creating a 2050 Roadmap, which sets a goal of net-zero emissions by 2050 and creates intermediate greenhouse gas emissions targets of 50% and 75% below 1990 levels by 2030 and 2045, respectively;
- Setting municipal electric and light plant clean energy targets and facilitating grid modernization and solar net-metering;
- Establishing a Clean Energy Equity Workforce and Market Development Program to provide workforce training, educational and professional development, and job placement in the Commonwealth's energy efficiency and clean energy industries. This program will be available to workers displaced from the fossil fuel industry, residents of environmental justice communities, and certified minority-owned and women-owned small business enterprises.

The bill will also provide protections for communities that are disproportionately impacted by pollution and other environmental threats. These communities, called “Environmental Justice Communities” consist of those that meet at least one of the following criteria: an annual median household income of no more than 65% of the statewide annual median; minorities comprise 40% or more of the population; 25% or more of households lack English language proficiency; or minorities comprise 25% or more of the population and the annual median household income of the municipality is at or below 150% of the statewide annual median. It requires an environmental impact report for any project likely to damage the environment that is located within one mile of an environmental justice population, or within five miles if the project is expected to affect air quality.