



SMART GROWTH AND REGIONAL COLLABORATION

October 26, 2020

The Honorable Aaron Michlewitz  
Chair, House Committee on Ways and Means  
State House, Room 243  
Boston, MA 02133

The Honorable Michael Rodrigues  
Chair, Senate Committee on Ways and Means  
State House, Room  
Boston, MA 02133

Dear Chair Michlewitz, Chair Rodrigues and members of the Joint Ways and Means Committees:

Thank you for your ongoing work to keep the Commonwealth healthy, safe, and responsive during these challenging times.

As the regional planning agency to the 101 cities of towns of Greater Boston, the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC), remains committed to using all the resources at our disposal to help cities and towns respond to the pandemic and prepare for recovery, including the money we receive from our local assessment and state funding. As you and your colleagues craft a state budget, we respectfully request that you include several key line items that support the communities of our Commonwealth. We look forward to continuing to work with you and your Committee on these and other issues.

District Local Technical Assistance Fund (DLTA) – within line item 1599-0026

Request: Level fund at \$3 million (FY2020 Figure: \$3 million)

We are deeply grateful for your past support of this program and ask that you level fund technical assistance work that is critical to the communities across the Commonwealth as we all work together quickly to address the changing needs of the public realm.

DLTA is unique in that it directly funds much-needed technical assistance for cities and towns. DLTA funding is appropriated for all 13 of the Commonwealth's Regional Planning Agencies (RPAs) to act as "technical assistance centers" for municipalities on a wide variety of land use permitting and planning functions, including zoning, housing production and preservation, transportation, public health, economic development, open space and conservation, clean energy and climate adaptation. Equally important, DLTA is used to help cities and towns to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of local government, and to regionalize planning, procurement, and service delivery wherever possible.

Planning assistance funds have taken on heightened importance during the current pandemic crisis. Between MAPC and the 12 other planning agencies across the state, nearly 100 projects were started in the first month of the outbreak. This includes work related to assessing the economic impact of the pandemic, leading contact tracing efforts, PPE distribution, convening municipal leaders to discuss regional responses, distributing Department of Public Health grants, and developing data dashboards for public awareness. MAPC and other planning agencies were able to quickly deploy DLTA funding to meet emerging needs in communities.

MAPC stretches these critical dollars to support as many communities as possible. Like our fellow regional planning agencies, each year we receive more requests for technical assistance than can be funded. We routinely bring municipalities together to address similar challenges in a more cost-

effective manner. We aggressively seek out outside funding and grant assistance, and are often able to provide a match greater than the 10% minimum required in statute.

**We urge the Legislature to level fund the DLTA program within line item 1599-0026 at \$3 million as was included in the Governor's revised FY21 budget proposal. This unique funding source provides direct support to cities and towns and enables them to respond nimbly to the quickly changing landscape of municipal needs.**

Senator Charles E. Shannon Community Safety Initiative – line item 8100-0111

Request: At least \$11 million (FY2020 figure: \$11 million)

We are grateful for your past support of this innovative grant program that combats youth violence, gang violence, and substance abuse through regional, multi-disciplinary efforts. These funds support groups of municipalities working together on anti-violence strategies, bringing together all departments in law enforcement and prevention, including human service agencies outside of government.

Shannon Grant funds have been used to support regional law enforcement operations, to hire outreach workers, to fund job training programs, and to support after school programs in many communities that are struggling with youth violence. Over 40 communities and hundreds of agencies have benefited from this program over the last 14 years, and in that time regional coordination between law enforcement and social and human services agencies has increased substantially.

MAPC facilitates the Metro Mayors Coalition Shannon Grant, which provides funds to eight cities and towns in the Inner Core subregion. Some of our Shannon Grant partners have already voiced concerns about the negative social and emotional impact on youth participants from the stay-at-home orders. Any cuts to this program would jeopardize the ability for programs to offer sufficient support to at-risk youth. Not only are the health impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic being strongly felt by the young adults served by Shannon Grant funded programs, but we also anticipate an even greater need for the intervention and multi-disciplinary approach this summer as we contemplate interventions layered with the need for social distancing. This “new normal” will require Shannon Grant partners throughout the state to rethink how engage at-risk youth, the types of activities they can hold, as well as the physical layout to hold these activities.

**We urge the Legislature to fund the Shannon Grant program at no less than \$11 million in FY2021. This funding is vital to support young adults who are even more at risk during this health crisis.**

### **Other Priorities**

I also wish to draw your attention to three broad categories of line items which MAPC believes are absolutely critical to the economic recovery of our region and the Commonwealth. These programs take on added importance considering anticipated instability in federal funding:

- 1.) **We urge you to continue your strong support for renters, landlords and homeowners who are at risk during these precarious financial times.** Throughout the pandemic, MAPC has analyzed the ways that COVID-related unemployment is impacting households in Massachusetts. According to research we released earlier this month, at least 80,000 households in Massachusetts – both tenants and landlords – will struggle to cover housing costs alongside other living expenses this month, leading to a potentially wave of evictions. The housing gap for rental households could exceed \$40 million in October alone and an estimated 60,000 Massachusetts renter households fear imminent eviction.

We ask that you include funding for the suite of initiatives proposed by the Governor that are significant steps toward securing housing stability. We hope the Legislature will extend the state moratorium as soon as possible, at least until December 31, to maximize the impact of the Governor's stabilizing initiatives announced. We are also advocating at the federal level to urge Congress to finally provide meaningful resources to prevent housing instability and homelessness both in Massachusetts and across the country.

- 2.) **We urge you to support funding for our local public health departments.** Local public health departments and regional health districts have been the backbone of our response to COVID-19: investigating known and suspected cases, tracing contacts, supporting and enforcing quarantine and isolation, enforcing essential business orders and re-opening guidance, and coordinating with town officials, first responders, businesses and residents and serving as a communications hub between residents and state officials.

This essential role in our statewide response is, however, currently the sole responsibility of individual municipalities with no dedicated state funding (unlike many other states in the US). Many municipalities have been able to address funding gaps by deploying federal CARES Act funding, enabling them to hire vital staff like public health nurses and inspectors. With a federal spending deadline of 12/31, these critical staff hires will have to be let go and their work left undone. We urge you to consider H.5045/S.2922, the SAPHE Act 2.0 which was recently endorsed by MAPC. Filed by Sen. Comerford, Rep. Kane and Rep. Garlick, the SAPHE Act 2.0 provides a pathway to state funding, including planning, technical assistance and ongoing sustainable operations, for this necessary function of government.

3. While it is outside of the legislation immediately before you, we want to take this opportunity to thank you for your advocacy and support of additional federal dollars and ask for your support to ensure municipalities have the necessary funding to respond to the continuing challenges of COVID-19 and the anticipated surge in the coming weeks.

The CARES Act funding has been an essential lifeline for municipal governments and state agencies to address unanticipated revenue losses and funding needs throughout the pandemic. Time is running out on this existing funding and the consequences are dire. Municipalities are required to send in purchase orders for supplies before October 30<sup>th</sup> and then must spend those funds before the December 31. **We ask for your support to encourage Congress to extend the deadlines for spending CARES Act funding.**

This is a critical time for cities and towns. Your support for these items will help municipalities build a new future together with an economy that is not only reopened but thriving. Our collective experience during the Great Recession and other events shows us that it is possible.

Thank you for your consideration of this letter and your support, dedication, and commitment to the cities and towns of Massachusetts. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at 617-933-0703 or [eweyant@mapc.org](mailto:eweyant@mapc.org).

Sincerely,



Lizzi Weyant  
Director of Government Affairs