**Memorandum**

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| **To:** | MAPC Executive Committee |
| **From:** | Government Affairs |
| **Date:** | December 14, 2022 |
| **Re:** | 2023 – 2024 Legislative Priorities – Topics for Further Research |

**Topics for Further Research**

In addition to these priorities listed above, we expect to bring additional items of interest to this Committee for its approval as they arise throughout the upcoming legislative session. The ideas listed below represent a mix of drafted legislation that we are still vetting and ideas that still need to be further researched before moving further. We expect that some could come to the Legislative Committee in the coming months.

**Arts and Culture:** This session, government affairs staff will partner with the arts and culture team at MAPC and external stakeholders to better understand how this sector is impacted across the policy landscape in our existing portfolio. We anticipate looking at land use and housing policies that impact access to establishing or preserving affordability of cultural space and the possibilities of culture use preservation restriction and municipal cultural space trust policies to address these challenges.

**Immigration:** Massachusetts, and the Boston region in particular, has seen a sharp increase in migrants arriving in the region. The recent arrival of more than 40 asylum seekers on Martha’s Vineyard put a spotlight on the need to establish greater support for new arrivals, but even before this incident, cities and towns have seen increasing numbers of new arrivals, some joining predetermined hosts or family members, and some that have been unannounced and in need of immediate services. We are currently exploring the best mechanisms to support the needs of arriving immigrants and refugees, including through much needed temporary housing, access to jobs, language access, equity in education, and more.

**Emergency Shelter Assistance:** While Massachusetts’ emergency shelter system has consistently struggled to meet demand, the current housing crisis, the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, and more recently, an unexpected influx of newly arrived migrants and refugees have exposed further cracks in the system’s ability to provide for emergency shelter needs. Government Affairs staff will continue to work with staff in other departments at MAPC, including our municipal, housing, and public health teams, alongside immigration advocates to understand funding needs for emergency shelter assistance. We will also evaluate and suggest statutory and regulatory changes to the program that would allow it to better and more quickly serve current needs, including wrap-around and support services.

**Rent Stabilization:** When left unchecked, market forces driving housing supply, demand, and cost often increase displacement pressures, particularly in markets like Greater Boston’s with extremely high demand and relatively low supply.While producing more housing remains a critical part of efforts to address Massachusetts’ housing crisis, the current gulf between supply and demand mean that it’s important to pair our production priorities with meaningful new protections for housing insecure tenants.

Together with other stakeholders, government affairs staff will research legislation allowing municipalities to impose a reasonable cap on rent increases within a set period. Research will prioritize proposals that ensure appropriate enforcement of building code standards and allow communities the flexibility needed to tailor requirements to local market conditions, adjust requirements with the market over time, and exempt new development from stabilization policies for a certain period. This research will be conducted with the goal of bringing a suitable proposal before the Legislative Committee for consideration.

**Utility Shut Offs:** While narrow prohibitions against utility shutoffs exist for specific situations, such as heating shut-off bans during winter months and the requirement for DPU approval of shut-offs for seniors, these bans stop far short of preventing utility shut-offs in all cases in which they are detrimental to the health and well-being of residents. As energy price volatility and uncertain economic times make it increasingly likely that low- and moderate-income residents will struggle to pay their utility bills, and cooling becomes more necessary to maintain safe indoor temperatures through increasingly dangerous summer heat, there is a growing need to re-evaluate and consider expanding the scope of utility shut offs to more fully protect residents from their potential negative health and safety impacts. Government Affairs staff will continue to work with clean energy staff and housing and energy advocates to develop potential new parameters for expanded shut offs.

**Right to Charge:** As more drivers in the Commonwealth shift to the use of electric vehicles, there is a clear need to rapidly build infrastructure to support electric vehicle charging. As electric vehicles become more accessible for low- and middle-income people in the coming years, we must invest in charging infrastructure that is accessible to renters. This bill would give renters and condo owners the “right to charge” in a designated parking spot. Currently, condo associations or landlords can ban the installation of charging infrastructure, even if the resident will be paying for the materials and installation.

**PFAS:** Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) are a group of artificial and nonnatural chemicals that are harmful to both health and the environment. A legislative report from 2022 and discussions from municipalities highlight the growing need to address the contaminant and the increased costs municipalities are shouldering to address its impacts. MAPC will work with a coalition of stakeholders and legislators to support legislation to address removal and remediation of these harmful chemicals in our waterways and natural resources.

**Parking minimums:** The government affairs team will continue to work with the data services and housing teams to understand state policy levers, likely regulatory frameworks around parking, which could help communities to right-size parking requirements to provide for local need while better supporting affordable housing development and mode shift to transit.

**Mass Access Bill –** For decades, local community media centers, which provide local public, educational, and government information to residents, have relied on funding from fees paid by cable providers. As the media landscape has shifted to streaming platforms, which still utilize public infrastructure to access and advertise, digital providers do not currently pay the fee charged to cable companies that is used to support local, public media. Government affairs staff are working with stakeholders to review a bill that would create a comparable fee for streaming services that cable companies pay to fill the gap in the funding that has been left by the shift in the way that residents are accessing media.

**Disaster Preparedness and COVID response:** The last two years have laid bare the shortfalls of the disaster preparedness plans and public health infrastructure at the national and state level. Though we have found creative solutions to address many of these areas, we continue to work with other agencies and partners to identify possible legislative solutions to address ongoing concerns regarding public health infrastructure and emergency preparedness.

**Opportunity for Justice-Involved Individuals:** MAPC has long worked with local leaders on community-centric initiatives to prevent violence and youth involvement in the criminal justice system through the Metropolitan Mayors’ Shannon Community Safety Initiative. However, we recognize that even with such programs in place, many people in our region will become involved with the justice system at some point in their lives. For many, the record of this involvement becomes a roadblock when seeking opportunities to build a better future, from jobs and housing to professional licensure and more. Government Affairs staff will research available policy levers to improve the record sealing process and provide more equitable access to opportunity for all residents across the MAPC region.

**Gun Violence:** Following the Supreme Court’s Bruen Decision in June 2022, the Massachusetts Legislature in July passed legislation harmonizing state gun control laws concerning proper cause with the decision. However, further action is needed to ensure that Massachusetts maintains our strong policies on gun control despite this decision from the Supreme Court, and to adapt to emerging challenges such as the production of 3-D printed ghost guns.

**Electronic enforcement of bus stops and bus lanes:** While bus lanes have been implemented across the region, actual enforcement of vehicle incursions into the lanes is limited and not well-accounted for in statute. The MBTA has no ability to use on-vehicle cameras to identify cars and trucks driving or parking in bus lanes. While local and transit police can enforce vehicles blocking lanes using a marked lane violation, this encourages additional, and often unnecessary, police interactions. Government Affairs and transportation staff will continue to research this topic with stakeholders.