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MOORE VOTES TO PASS MUNICIPAL RELIEF PACKAGE

Boston - The Massachusetts Legislature today passed a municipal relief package that establishes a statewide mutual aid agreement to allow cities and towns to share resources, permits municipalities to extend funding schedules for pension systems and allows for regionalization efforts among municipalities. The measure will give cities and towns across Massachusetts new tools for managing their budgets in these challenging fiscal times. Sen. Michael O. Moore (D-Millbury) voted in favor of the legislation.

“Cities and towns are struggling right now, and it is important that state government step up to the plate and ease some of the burden on our municipalities,” said Sen. Moore. “This bill is a major step towards the Commonwealth helping our local communities to cope with revenue loss and increased expenses, by better enabling them to take pro-active steps to improve their situations.”

In an effort to save municipalities money, the bill establishes a statewide mutual aid agreement to allow municipalities to share fire services, law enforcement, emergency medical services, public works and other local services in the case of a public safety or public works incident.

In addition to mutual aid, the bill would allow regional school districts to join with municipal districts to share a superintendent that would represent the partnering districts. The bill also creates a commission to study efficient and effective strategies for regionalization to bring further cost savings to municipalities across the Commonwealth.

The bill also provides pension funding relief for cities and towns by extending their funding schedules to 2040. In addition, the legislation creates an optional early retirement program for municipalities. Participating employees would need at least 20 years of service to participate and municipalities would be required to limit the total number of employees who can take part in the program.

The legislation allows municipalities to lease public buildings for up to 30 years. Currently, cities and towns may only lease public buildings for up to 10 years. To relieve the tax burden on veterans and members of the National Guard, the bill expands property tax abatement to all veterans and establishes a 100 percent property tax abatement for active National Guard members and reservists on duty in a foreign country.

The bill also allows cities and towns to establish temporary tax amnesty programs under which municipalities may waive portions of the penalties and interest due on unpaid taxes as long as the taxpayer pays the principal amount owed and was not the subject of a criminal investigation for failure to pay taxes.

To help save costs, the bill allows school committees to offer a program to reimburse parents who voluntarily choose to transport their disabled child to an approved out of district placement. In order to offer such a program, though, the community must demonstrate that the program will result in cost savings.

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