

HOUSE No. 4252

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts



CHARLES D. BAKER
GOVERNOR

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KARYN POLITO
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR

December 13, 2019

To the Honorable Senate and House of Representatives,

Pursuant to Section 5 of Article LXIII, as amended by Section 4 of Article XC of the Amendments to the Constitution, I am today signing House Bill 4246, “An Act Making Appropriations for the Fiscal Year 2019 to Provide for Supplementing Certain Existing Appropriations and for Certain Other Activities and Projects,” but disapproving the four sections described below.

I am signing this bill December 13, 2019, a date that is almost six months after the end of fiscal year 2019, and 43 days past the October 31st statutory deadline for the closing of the books on the previous fiscal year. A developing pattern of late appropriation bills bodes poorly for the future fiscal health of the Commonwealth, particularly if we encounter more challenging budgetary times.

It also casts significant shade on what should be a bright story concerning a shared commitment to fiscal discipline and a significant success story concerning the Stabilization Fund. The transfer of exceptionally high capital gains tax collections to the Stabilization Fund has brought the balance of the rainy day fund to its highest level ever. When the Comptroller officially closes the books, the fiscal 2019 Stabilization Fund year-end balance will be \$3.4 billion. This represents an extraordinary threefold increase during the course of the past five years. This balance represents more than 10% of the amount collected in fiscal 2019 taxes, and is a substantial buffer for essential government services in the event of a recession.

The bill I am signing today authorizes \$542 million in direct appropriations, or \$346 million net of related MassHealth revenue. After accounting for a transfer to pay down unfunded liability for future retiree health insurance, the total net fiscal impact of the bill is \$393 million. The bulk of this spending was anticipated during the course of the year and is affordable within budgeted revenues.

While I am signing the majority of this bill, I disapprove Sections 8, 9, 38, and 100, which relate to automatic voter registration (“AVR”). AVR became law on August 9, 2018, and since that date, the Commonwealth agencies charged with implementing it have worked diligently to prepare for its January 1, 2020 roll-out – the date originally set by the Legislature. The proposed sections would delay implementation until April 1, 2020, rendering AVR unavailable for the 2020 presidential primary, and, more importantly, would significantly change voter registration procedures a mere 18 days before our go-live date to implement this important law. I cannot approve sections that would jeopardize the success of the program and require a substantial change to the voter registration process in the middle of an election cycle.

The remainder of this bill I approve.

Respectfully Submitted,

Charles D. Baker,
Governor