

**SENATE . . . . . No. 2474**

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**The Commonwealth of Massachusetts**



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KARYN POLITO  
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR

*January 21, 2020*

To the Honorable Senate and House of Representatives,

Mr. Speaker. Madame President. Members of the House and Senate. Members of Congress. Fellow Constitutional Officers. Members of the Governor's Council. Mr. Chief Justice and Members of the Judiciary. Members of the Cabinet and my Administration. Sheriffs. District Attorneys. Mayors. Local Officials. Reverend Clergy. Distinguished Guests.

To our Lieutenant Governor Karyn Polito, my partner in leading this Administration. I want to take a moment to extend gratitude on behalf of all of us here today. For your work as Chair of the Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence Council, Co-Chair of the STEM Council and for your tireless work helping us build strong communities.

To my wife of 32 years, Lauren Baker. I thank you. And love you for all that you are.

This past holiday season, you and the team at the Wonderfund distributed over 125,000 gifts to more than 50,000 kids served by the Department of Children and Families, one more amazing example of the work you all do to support the children served by DCF.

To the men and women in Public Safety, Law Enforcement and Corrections. We're all grateful for everything you do to keep our communities safe.

The horrific unprovoked attack at Souza Baranowski several weeks ago reminded us that this is difficult and, at times, very dangerous work. Thank You!

And in these deeply troubled times throughout the world, our hearts and hopes are with our men and women in uniform and their blessed families. To the Gold Star families here with us tonight, you and your loved ones are heroes to us all.

To my Fellow Citizens, thank you for this opportunity to serve.

And thank you for your insights, high fives, fist bumps and obvious commitment to your communities, your friends and family and one another. Your kindness and generosity are like oxygen for the rest of us.

Last year we made real progress on issues that make a big difference in the lives of our residents.

Let's start with vaping.

We led the nation in responding to the growing body of evidence concerning this relatively new activity. As the warning signs of sudden illness, injury, and death here in Massachusetts and across the country became clear, we acted.

Together we moved quickly to protect our teens and adults. And today we have the most comprehensive legal framework in the country to oversee and regulate this untested, and potentially dangerous, activity.

We're now implementing the nationally recognized criminal justice reform law we passed in 2018.

I want to give special thanks to the members of the Black and Latino Caucus for your insights and observations along the way. Your contributions have been invaluable.

Last January, we proposed to expand the Medicare Savings Program. Starting this month, 40,000 low income seniors will save thousands of dollars on their out of pocket drug costs.

When we took office many communities in Western Mass had no plan for installing high speed internet.

But later this month, after 4 years of work and great support from the Legislature, every one of those communities will either already have high speed service or have a plan in place to make it happen.

Our economy is booming, our unemployment rate is below 3% and we have more people working than at any time in our history.

Strong fiscal management and a robust economy have resulted in back to back billion-dollar budget surpluses, which we used to double down on our Rainy Day Fund. Today, that fund balance stands at \$3.5 billion. It's the highest level ever, by a wide margin.

We also cut taxes for working families, and delivered on a promise made to voters 20 years ago to reduce the state income tax rate to 5%.

Finally, we've taken bold action to tackle the opioid crisis, and have shown the rest of the nation the way forward.

Working together, we nearly tripled state spending on prevention and treatment.

And what was a public policy catastrophe now offers hope for families and a dramatic reduction in the shame of stigma.

We've been able to do all of this by finding common ground, by refusing to engage in the partisan nonsense that consumes so much of our national politics and by putting the people of our Commonwealth first.

That's why I can stand here before you tonight and say without a doubt, the state of our Commonwealth is strong.

But much remains to be done.

We have to align our health care policies with the nature of illness, and the 21st century hopes and expectations of our residents.

We're a national leader on climate policy, but we have to take more decisive action.

Our economic success means we have to address long-standing issues in transportation and housing.

We have to continue to reduce the skills gap between people looking for better work and the needs of many of our employers.

And we must ensure that every child, regardless of who they are or where they live, has access to a high-quality education.

On health care, we've done great work over the past five years.

Our leadership in fighting the opioid epidemic has set the table for other states.

We've maintained access to women's health services in the face of federal cutbacks.

The multi-decade clinical embarrassment at Bridgewater State Hospital has become a new lease on life for many of those who are committed there.

A Health Connector that had become a national punch line now stands as a model for every other state, providing affordable health insurance coverage to over 300,000 people.

We've cleaned up the out of control MassHealth program, dramatically expanded community-based mental health services and limited the growth in total health care spending.

But there's much more we should do.

Our Administration filed a major health care reform bill last fall. And we appreciate the Legislature's decision to schedule a hearing on that bill later this month.

I don't plan to go over all 179 pages of the bill tonight, but you know I'd love to.

Put simply, for the past 50 years, our health care system has been focused on promoting and supporting the technological advancement of medicine. That focus has cured disease and saved lives.

But even as that progress has continued, our health care system has failed to adapt to the changing nature of illness and the gaps in care that have been created by this approach.

For years, we have neglected preventive services that keep people healthy and out of our emergency rooms, like primary care, addiction services, geriatrics and behavioral health care.

We're also an aging population.

Many of us who live to the age of 60 (like me, and many others in this room) will likely make it into our 80's and 90's, where brain diseases are far more common than they used to be.

For a variety of clinical and sociological reasons, mental health, addiction and behavioral health issues are far more challenging than they were in the past, and increasingly intertwined with physical illnesses.

A 21st century health system should presume that time spent with patients and their families matters. People dealing with 2, 3 or 4 chronic illnesses need guidance, advice and support, and so do their family members.

Our system should reward clinicians who invest in time and connection with patients and their families. But our current system does not. And this is a major problem.

At its most fundamental level, our proposal is about nudging caregivers and health plans.

To put more resources into time, on primary care and behavioral health services, while limiting overall cost increases.

Massachusetts has always led the nation on health care. Let's do it again.

Federal disaster relief spending today is almost 10 times higher than it was 30 years ago.

Let's think about that.

From fishing and farming to critical public infrastructure and basic necessities like clean drinking water, there's no dispute that the consequences of climate change are real and potentially devastating.

Thankfully, despite significant steps backward in Washington, we in Massachusetts continue to lead.

We created the first Municipal Vulnerability Program in the country, so local communities would have the ability to address future threats before they occur.

More than 285 communities have joined us. And with our support, they're working to protect their property and infrastructure from the effects of climate change.

We're committed to expanding this essential program to all 351 communities. And we'll bring this Administration's total investment in climate resiliency to just over \$1 billion by 2022.

But cities and towns from the Berkshires to Cape Cod will need more support to finish the job.

That's why we proposed creating a trust, which would generate about \$130 million every year to protect critical infrastructure, fix culverts, design flood paths and adapt to our new reality.

Let's face it: on this time is not our friend. We urge the Legislature to move quickly on this critical bill.

Massachusetts also leads the nation in procuring clean, renewable energy.

Two major affordably priced offshore wind projects await federal approval. Combined with our Canadian hydropower project, these investments would meet 30% of our electricity consumption requirements and at the same time eliminate 5.7 million metric tons of greenhouse gas emissions every single year.

But yesterday's solutions and yesterday's plans are no longer sufficient. We must continue to take bold action to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions.

Tonight, I'm committing the Commonwealth to achieving an ambitious climate goal: net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050.

That is why we're working with our colleagues across the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic states on a Regional Transportation and Climate Initiative. This encompasses 70 million people and 50 million vehicles.

Greenhouse gas emissions from transportation have been on the rise for decades and now represent 40% of this state's total emissions. Unless we take on transportation, we won't meet our objectives.

I get that this is going to be hard. But together, we have a real opportunity, and a responsibility to achieve a significant reduction in transportation emissions.

RGGI, the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative that our proposal is based on, has worked for 10 years. Power plants have adopted clean energy solutions and funded energy efficiency programs, investing \$3.3 billion across the region. Greenhouse gas emissions in the power sector have dropped by nearly 50%.

Applied to the transportation sector, the same market mechanisms can encourage automakers and fuel suppliers to find efficiencies and deploy cleaner fuels.

In addition, the Transportation and Climate Initiative will deliver millions of dollars in needed investments in our transportation infrastructure. It's a critical part in expanding public transportation, transforming our highways and reducing congestion.

But our transportation challenges are far more expansive than just climate change.

Decades of underinvestment in the T have combined with the skyrocketing growth of our workforce, and 100 million Uber and Lyft rides every year, to put tremendous pressure on every part of our transportation system.

The issues we're all dealing with, and the loss of time and reliability that comes with them, are unacceptable.

Since 2015, we've been working hard on this.

That's why we were the first Administration in state history to invest more than \$1 billion a year to Build a Better T.

We're also the first to fund an unprecedented 5 year, \$8 billion infrastructure modernization program, to improve reliability and add thousands of seats to the system.

It's why we rescued the \$2 billion Green Line Extension project, expanded commuter rail service and funded, and began building, the decades-delayed \$1 billion Southcoast Rail project.

It's also why we've replaced a third of the bus fleet, expanded the Silver Line, and continue to enhance and expand dedicated bus lanes.

But we have much more to do.

To build on these improvements, we filed an \$18 billion transportation bond bill last year, the largest ever.

\$11 billion would be invested in road and bridge improvements, with another \$7 billion for additional expansion and modernization of transit, commuter rail and bus services.

Our 2021 budget proposal will include an increase of \$135 million in operating funds for the T.

This will ensure the T has the resources it needs to implement the recommendations of its Safety Review Panel and continue to accelerate service improvements.

Traffic is also a problem and it's no longer just at rush hour. Transportation Network Companies provide a valuable service, but they clog our roads and operate with very little oversight.

Legislation that we filed will give us the information and the tools we need to better manage where they can go and when, so that they remain a vital but less disruptive part of our transportation community.

We know these are big, complicated issues, but we urge the Legislature to act as quickly as possible on these bills.

The sooner we have access to both the tools and the funding, the sooner we can make our transportation system safer, better and more reliable.

Five years ago, we made a commitment to significantly increase state investments in affordable, workforce, and transit-oriented housing.

18 months ago, you passed and we signed the largest housing bond bill in state history.

Homeless families are being supported in more appropriate settings, which is why virtually all of the hotels and motels that used to shelter homeless families have been retired.

We are making progress, but demand is outpacing supply. The result?

Families are forced to rent substandard housing, or move further away from jobs. And seniors either move out or face financial ruin.

Our current zoning laws aren't working.

They're a wall between the well off and the up and coming. They punish families and young people who are not already 'in the market.' And they make it almost impossible for local communities to do what makes sense for their residents.

We talk a lot about the need for greater equity these days. But a proposal that removes the single greatest barrier to housing that families can afford has been sitting under review for years.

We say we want to make Massachusetts more affordable. And yet, thousands of units of desperately needed housing get majority support from their local communities, only to fail to be built because current zoning laws require a supermajority vote.

I get the fact that some advocates think our housing production bill is too much, and others think it's not enough. What I know for sure is doing nothing, maintaining the status quo, has been hurting families for years.

For the sake of our communities, our young people, our seniors and our families, let's find the common ground on housing policy that must be in here somewhere. And let's get this done.

To keep our economy strong, we're focused on two important initiatives.

First, Lieutenant Governor Polito just spent a year touring the Commonwealth, hearing from local leaders, legislators, private companies and non-profits, as we drafted our economic development plan for this term.

The finished product is appropriately called Partnerships for Growth, because we succeed when we work together. Legislation based on the report will be filed for your consideration next month.

The second initiative will focus on addressing the persistent skills gap we have, between people looking to work their way up the jobs ladder and the needs and expectations of many of our employers.

To address this, we'll launch a \$15 million partnership with our vocational schools to give thousands of people, adults and high schoolers, 'hands-on' educational opportunities.

Opportunities they don't have now under our current approach.

The partnership will transform vocational schools, to provide classes in three shifts.

Adults can take classes during the evening. Traditional high school students can take classes after their regular school day. And full-time vocational school students attend as they do now.

These Career Technical Institutes will turbocharge our approach to applied learning and industry specific credentialing.

Over the next several years, this partnership will train 20,000 new, skilled, and diverse workers in key trades and technical jobs.



Our economy is the envy of the nation. And we look forward to working with you, so that everyone in Massachusetts has the skills they need to be part of our collective success.

Yesterday, at least it seems like yesterday, we enacted another groundbreaking education reform law during the first half of this legislative session.

Improving education began in the 1990's, when we passed a law that included a major infusion of new state funds in our schools, combined with accountability measures. Parents, teachers and students ran with it and took Massachusetts from the middle of the pack to among the nation's leaders in K-12 education.

In 2010, we expanded the toolkit so we could work on fixing troubled schools and districts.

Among other things, this made it possible for Jeff Riley to become the receiver/superintendent in Lawrence, which was transformative for the kids and families in that community.

The new law builds on the first two and makes an unprecedented \$1.5 billion commitment of new state funds, to elevate our kids and our schools.

But let's remember, these funds are just the foundation. Dollars are important, especially in the communities that will benefit most from this infusion of resources. But they're not the only thing that has to change.

The money didn't change in Lawrence under then-Superintendent Riley. Lawrence worked well because everything else changed.

The new leadership, combined with gifted and talented programs, acceleration academies, parental outreach, applied learning opportunities, longer school days and early college programs helped students find their footing. And they blossomed.

To date, 154 Lawrence High School students have graduated with more than 2,600 college credits at no cost to them or their families through our early college program.

Dozens earned full scholarships at area colleges. Joining us today are 11 of them, 6 from Merrimack College and 5 from Northern Essex Community College.

Mayor Dan Rivera, would you and your students please stand and be recognized.

Congratulations. I know I speak for everyone here tonight when I wish you all the best as you continue your education.

Many people have questioned the state's ability to fund our new education law.

But I think that may be the easiest part. The harder part will be implementing the proven strategies in schools and districts throughout Massachusetts that change the game for kids.

This is our chance to give every child in this Commonwealth the opportunity they deserve to be great. And we should fully embrace it.

As I look back over the past five years, I can't help but be gratified by the opportunity to serve and humbled by the experiences that come with it, gratified by the progress we've made in so many areas, and honored to have the chance to build on that work going forward.

But mostly, I've been humbled by the people I've met, the stories they've told me and the chance they've given me to walk, if only briefly, in their shoes.

The courage and kindness of so many families who've lost loved ones in the line of duty.

The grit and perseverance of the people I've met battling their own addiction, or the addiction of a family member.

The foster parents and foster children who've taken the time to tell me their stories, without mincing words along the way.

The faith and resilience of John, Nancy, Jen, Andrew, Julie and Pete Frates.

A family that turned a terrible twist of fate into an opportunity to change the world.

Day after day after day, as Pete descended into the grip of ALS, he and his family fought the disease and raised awareness and hundreds of millions of dollars, changing the game forever for all those impacted by ALS.

Pete's sister Jen and brother Andrew are with us tonight; you both grace us with your presence. Would you please stand.

Because we are lucky, most of us will live lives that are filled with manageable problems to be solved. The loss that many families suffer through is the exception to the rule.

But in these public jobs, we often have a role and a responsibility to share in those family struggles, and sometimes in their grief.

I'm always blown away by the bravery and decency our neighbors display, in what must be their darkest moments.

There are lessons in those moments.

They speak to the exceptional nature of the people we have the opportunity to represent. Why we should always strive to make things better. To fix what doesn't work. To get the very

best we can out of each other. And to recognize and understand that pointless bickering solves nothing.

People who deal with much greater troubles than ours will rightly question us if we waste our time, and theirs, on the politics of personal destruction. They want us to be better than the yelling they see on TV and across social media.

They're not paid advocates. They're our neighbors. They are reasonable people.

They want us to work together to build stronger, safer communities, a better economy and a more resilient, respectful and hopeful Commonwealth.

They are civil to a fault. And we should be too.

We all know campaigns are contests, and the siren call of sloganeering and cheap shots will be everywhere this year.

Let's rise above it.

We've demonstrated time and time again over the past five years that we can find common purpose.

That we can lead and represent the very special people of this very special place we call home.

That we can focus on progress. Build on what we have. And live up to the ideals, courage and appropriately high expectations of our neighbors.

Let's make them, and each other, proud.

God Bless This Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

God Bless The United States of America.

Respectfully submitted,

Charles D. Baker,  
*Governor*