

# Town of Franklin

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## OFFICE OF THE TOWN ADMINISTRATOR

March 11, 2022

**The Honorable Karen E. Spilka**

Senate President  
Room 332  
24 Beacon Street  
Boston, MA 01233

**Rebecca Rausch**

State Senator  
Room 418  
24 Beacon Street  
Boston, MA 01233

**Jeffrey N. Roy**

State Representative  
Room 43  
24 Beacon Street  
Boston, MA 01233

**Re: Fiscal Year 2023 State Budget Priorities**

Dear Franklin Legislative Delegation:

The Town of Franklin and the Franklin Public School District takes this opportunity to thank you for your continued support during the current legislative session. Per your request, we have included five priorities for the upcoming Fiscal Year 2023 State Budget:

**State Aid - Increases in State Aid from the H2 Proposal, Chapter 70, UGGA, and Circuit Breaker Funds**

The Town of Franklin and the Franklin Public School District would like to advocate in support of increasing state aid from the Governor's H. 2 proposal and would also like to advocate for an increase in Chapter 70 education aid and UGGA. We would like to speak in support of the MMA's proposal to use the fiscal 2022 state budget figure as the base, which would in turn increase the UGGA account by 7.3%, or \$85.3 million. Fiscal 2023 state tax collections are forecasted to be \$2.5 billion higher (7.3%) than the tax base that was used to pass the fiscal 2022 budget last July, and state tax collections have increased by \$6.32 billion (21.3%) since fiscal 2020. Unfortunately, the governor's fiscal 2023 budget proposes just a 2.7% increase for UGGA, or \$31.5 million to be distributed across 351 cities and towns. The governor's budget (House 2) uses a recently upgraded revenue estimate for fiscal 2022, rather than the one used in the state budget as enacted, leading to an artificially low growth projection that fails to share the higher-than-expected revenue growth with cities and towns.

House 2 would increase Chapter 70 school aid to \$5.98 billion, with a \$485 million increase in fiscal 2023, fulfilling commitments in the Student Opportunity Act. A further examination of the budget, however, shows that 136 of 318 operating districts (43%) would receive only the minimum per-student increase of \$30, thus providing those districts with a Chapter 70 increase of just 1%, far below inflation. We would like to advocate for an increased minimum aid to \$100 per student to ensure that all districts can, at a minimum, keep pace

with inflation and maintain their school services.

A recalculation of the Circuit Breaker claims by DESE establishes a new number for full funding of Circuit Breaker, estimated to be \$460,675,120. This is an increase of \$35 million from the initial estimate and differs from the Governor's budget by \$46,055,763. We advocate for an increase by fully funding Circuit Breaker at \$460,675,120. State aid is essential for municipalities to maintain personnel and provide all necessary services to the residents it serves. It is essential that this aid is increased and given to municipalities in order to supplement their budgets and enable them to provide all necessary services.

#### **Legislative Appropriation - \$15,000 - In support of K-5 Anti-Bias Curriculum Through the Anti-Defamation League**

The Franklin Public School District has made it a priority to address issues of bias, prejudice and discrimination and promote an inclusive learning environment in which racial, cultural, and other human differences are respected and valued. The District has a long-standing relationship with the Anti-Defamation League and is implementing "A World of Difference", a middle and high school program where students are trained as peer leaders and teach their classmates about addressing bias. A legislative appropriation to expand upon this work would allow for the extension of this program into the Franklin Public Schools elementary schools. An appropriation of \$15,000 would support the implementation of the Anti-Defamation League's K-5 curriculum, which consists of a 3-hour professional learning program and curriculum materials for all classroom teachers, counselors, and special educators in the District's elementary schools. This program would provide teachers, administrators and other education professionals with the knowledge, tools, and resources to lead lessons that explicitly assist younger students in learning about and addressing issues of bias, prejudice, and discrimination in a developmentally appropriate way. This will deepen our efforts in promoting an inclusive learning environment in which individual differences are respected and valued.

#### **Legislative Appropriation - \$70,000 - In Support of Mental Health Screenings in Franklin Public Schools**

The Franklin Public Schools initiated a mental health screening program with the Wellesley Center for Women in the spring of 2022, which augments our Wellness curriculum and the services of our counseling staff in meaningful ways. This mental health screening is occurring in two grades in 2022: grades 8 and 10. Clinicians teach lessons to students about mental health and suicide prevention and then students complete research-based questionnaires to screen for depression, anxiety, and suicide risk. Clinicians meet with individual students who are deemed to be at risk and work with families to secure mental health support both within and outside of the school setting. The Franklin Public Schools is seeking a legislative appropriation of \$70,000 to continue this partnership so that additional grades of students can experience these same lessons and screenings in the 2022-2023 school year.

#### **Legislative Appropriation - \$200,000 - Replace Fletcher Field Playground**

In addition to the priorities outlined above for priority in the FY23 state budget deliberations, we are also advocating for the following appropriation to the state budget. The Franklin Fletcher Field Playground was originally renovated in 2004 for age appropriate 5-12 year olds. This playground structure still stands adjacent



to the newer tot lot. It features a play structure designed to meet the challenges of the 5-12 year old age group. This is an old Landscape Structures Play venture piece with on-ground components (log roll, curled monkey bars, multiple slides, rock climbing wall, and a rope climb). The safety surfacing is engineered wood fiber which is 12-18 inches deep. New swing seats have been added for a safer swing set area and some of the outdated dangerous items have been removed. Over time this playground has become antiquated and the Town of Franklin would like to demolish the current playground and replace it with a new handicap accessible playground so that all members of our community and surrounding areas can enjoy a fun, safe playground that is accessible to all.

### **Bill H.596 School Operational Efficiency**

We are writing in support of Bill H.596 as it is critically important to our school district. The proposed legislation would raise the procurement threshold from \$50,000 to \$100,000. The implementation of this bill would allow our School District to obtain quotes for goods and services valued under \$100,000 rather than going through the time-consuming sealed bid process.

This minor change to MGL30B would allow school districts who are suffering from understaffing to make more efficient and timely purchases in critical areas of school operations. With inflation running at 5.9% the benchmark of \$50,000 is no longer considered a large contract and should not require the sealed bid process. In addition to the aforementioned benefits, this no-cost legislation would allow school departments to take advantage of money-saving discounts offered on multi-year licenses by permitting prepayment of software and online curriculum subscriptions. This bill will offset the costs incurred to provide transportation to homeless students by authorizing the creation of transportation reimbursement funds for municipal school districts. Bill H.596 will also help to fill critical staff shortages in the area of pupil transportation by expediting 7D licensing at the Registry of Motor Vehicles.

In fact, a bill such as H. 596 should be applied throughout all public procurement as the cost of goods is increasing so quickly, it would result in savings and efficiency at the local level in municipal operations as well. The \$50,000 threshold is too low for the many reasons outlined above as they relate to schools.

Thank you for your consideration of the aforementioned budgetary priorities. The Town of Franklin and the Franklin Public School District greatly appreciates your continued support.

Sincerely,



Jamie Hellen

Town Administrator



Sara Ahern

Superintendent of Schools

Cc: Town Council, Town of Franklin  
School Committee, Town of Franklin