

SENATE No. 1

Senate, January 3, 2019 -- Message from His Excellency the Governor relative to the general concerns of the Commonwealth

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts



CHARLES D. BAKER
GOVERNOR

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS
24 BEACON STREET · BOSTON, MA 02133

KARYN POLITO
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR

January 3, 2019

To the Honorable Senate and House of Representatives,

Mr. Speaker. Madam President. Members of the House and Senate. 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 commitment to this endeavor and the sacrifices your family has made.

Members of my family who are here this afternoon, my brothers, Jonathan and Sandy. Our Dad, the best and smartest guy we've ever known, thanks for being an incredible role model for us.

Our wonderful children, Charlie, AJ and Caroline.

And my wife Lauren, the first lady of the Commonwealth, the love of my life for the past 31 years.

And to my Fellow Citizens.

Let me begin by thanking the people of the Commonwealth for giving the Lieutenant Governor and me four more years to serve them. We remember election night in 2014. It was so close, it ended the next day.

We had a lot to prove to the people of Massachusetts. About our vision for the Commonwealth. Our approach to governing. Our priorities. Our work ethic. And our capacity to get things done.

We said we'd work to build a state government that was as thrifty, hard-working and creative as the people of this great state. And we're grateful for your continued faith in us.

To the lawmakers returning to this chamber, we say welcome back. And we look forward to building on the partnership we've established and the progress that we've made.

And a special welcome to those of you who are embarking on a new journey here on Beacon Hill. I'm quite sure you've heard about the good work that goes on here, as well as those areas in which we fall short. We all strive to build a Commonwealth of hope, opportunity and possibility.

And we seek to do so in a way that ensures people are heard.

My advice? Spend time outside of the State House. Listen to your constituents. Lead with your head and your heart. And make the best decisions you can for those you serve.

And in this era of snapchats, tweets, Facebook and Instagram posts, putdowns and smack-downs, I'd ask you all to remember that good public policy is about perseverance and collaboration.

Many times, it is a story written frame by frame by many players who write it over time, relentlessly pursuing an objective.

Think about the Commonwealth's leadership on national issues.

We have the highest rate of health care coverage in the nation. But the story was written across two decades, ten legislative sessions, five governors and four Presidents.

We have best in the nation gun laws, a story that was written across multiple legislative sessions and several Governors and was almost always bipartisan.

We have a K-12 education system that, despite its limitations, is the envy of the country.

This story was written by a large cast of leaders and contributors across decades of deliberation and action.

As we approach the third decade of the 21st century, we're engaged in a number of difficult policy issues. Some will be with us long after our time on Beacon Hill is done.

But it's incumbent on us to pursue these tasks with foresight, intelligence and commitment, so that we can rest assured that when our time is done, those who come after us will be able to build on the foundation we've established.

As I look forward, I'm grateful that we're taking on difficult policy issues from a position of strength.

Massachusetts no longer has a structural budget deficit. In fact, we ended last year with a major budget surplus. Deposited over \$650 million into our Stabilization Fund. And anticipate making another major deposit to that Fund at the end of this fiscal year. And we did it without raising taxes.

When we took office the annual growth rate in Medicaid spending was in the double digits, drastically reducing what funds were available to support other important programs.

Today, it's growing at a rate that is more in line with the increase in overall state spending.

We added 4,000 seats to our superb vocational and technical schools. And we invested \$50 million in capital grants to upgrade equipment and expand programs in high demand fields.

With your help, the Department of Children and Families has made tremendous progress serving some of the Commonwealth's most at risk children and families. Caseloads are at historic lows and virtually all of our social workers are licensed.

The Registry of Motor Vehicles implemented a new technology platform and the federal Real ID program at the same time. This was a big lift, and there were some bumps along the way.

But this past fall, the Registry served 90 % of its customers in under 30 minutes and virtually everyone else in less than an hour.

We enacted the BRAVE Act and broke ground on a \$200 million rebuild of the Soldier's Home in Chelsea, proving once again that no state is more committed to delivering for its veterans than Massachusetts.

We doubled the earned income tax credit for 450,000 low income working families, invested over \$100 million in new funding into our early education system and reduced the use of hotels and motels to shelter homeless families by over 95%.

We also worked with the Legislature on two procurements that will lead to 50% of our electricity being generated by clean resources. And then delivered a bid process that came in far below the prices people anticipated.

Think about that!

We delivered huge environmental benefits and lower energy prices. And now everybody wants to duplicate our process.

Our regulatory reform project reduced the complexity of state government across the board, allowing our small businesses to become more competitive in a dynamic economy.

And our 'get stuff done' approach with public private partnerships in economic development, advanced manufacturing, robotics and smart materials has created jobs and opportunity across the Commonwealth.

As a result, our economy is booming.

We have more people working than at any time in state history. Over 200,000 jobs have been created since we took office. Our labor force participation rate is at an all-time high. And people are moving to Massachusetts because we offer good jobs and opportunity.

Thanks to the hard work of so many, the state of our Commonwealth is strong!

By putting the public interest ahead of partisan politics, we've made our Commonwealth a better place to live for our residents. But there's always much left to do.

Twenty-five years ago, Massachusetts wasn't a national leader in public education.

Since then, we've achieved remarkable success by working together on a series of education reforms. As a result, Massachusetts students have scored number one on the National Assessment of Educational Progress exams in English and math for much of the past decade. And last year finished first on the Advanced Placement exams as well.

But when it comes to the difference in performance between urban and suburban school districts, we can and must do better.

The Foundation Formula needs to be updated and we'll propose updates when our budget is filed later this month.

But progress isn't just about money.

Education Commissioner Jeff Riley proved during his time as Receiver in Lawrence that significant progress can be made in improving school and student performance by changing the way our schools operate.

Before that, he transformed the Clarence Edwards Middle School in Boston from the lowest performing middle school in the city into one of the best.

With that success in mind, our budget will also include opportunities for underperforming school districts to invest jointly with the Department of Education in proven best practices like acceleration academies, professional development, after school enrichment and leadership development programs.

We all have an opportunity to give our kids their best chance to succeed in a 21st century economy. It's up to us to come together and seize this opportunity and lay the groundwork for their success.

There's also much to do in transportation.

I'll begin with a quick shout out to our Transportation Futures Commission. Predicting a future where there is so much possibility is difficult. They did great work and I want to highlight some of their recommendations.

First, continue to invest in public transportation.

This is an area in which the Commonwealth sat on its hands for far too many years and we're all paying the price for it.

"Over the course of the next five years, the T plans to spend over \$8 billion on infrastructure, much of which will be invested in its core system. This is more than twice what has ever been spent in any 5-year period.

This will be no small task.

One of the reasons previous administrations didn't invest in the core system is the complexity of upgrading and modernizing a system that operates 20 hours a day, seven days a week.

The constant tug between getting people where they need to go and disrupting that system to make it better is a big challenge. But it's one that must be identified, scoped and overcome.

The T also needs to leverage its automated fare system once it's in place in 2020. For the first time, that system will give the T real time data on how its riders use the system. That creates huge opportunities to improve service. To think differently about fares, routes and pricing. And to modernize operations to better serve customers.

Second, we must make the investments in public infrastructure that will enable the next generation of zero emission and autonomous vehicles to thrive here in the Commonwealth.

Getting this right will require unprecedented collaboration with local government and our New England neighbors, as well as innovative partnerships with the private sector.

Third, reduce greenhouse gas emissions within the transportation system.

The work we're poised to do with other Northeast and Mid-Atlantic states should produce a cap and investment system for transportation that mirrors our successful model for energy.

It will create the largest program of its kind in US history.

Finally, we need to more fully appreciate the relationship between where people live and where they work and how state and local government policies affect their ability to get from one to the other.

I've spoken before about this housing crisis.

For over 20 years, we've produced less than half the new units of housing that we produced like clockwork in the previous forty years.

As a result, we have limited inventory. And the inventory we have gets priced out of sight, forcing people to live farther and farther away from where they work.

I believe that our housing bill was a strong step in the right direction to deal with this. It respected the need for communities to plan for themselves, but created incentives to tie development more closely to overarching strategies concerning transportation and land use generally. In the end, it failed because it was too much for some and not enough for others.

We shouldn't let the perfect become the enemy of the good.

Building a stronger, more equitable, more resilient and more successful Commonwealth rests on several pillars. But one of the most important ones is delivering a big increase in housing production. We need to get this done.

We have also made progress on criminal justice.

Three years ago we enacted legislation that prohibited sending women who'd been civilly committed due to an addiction to prison.

And two years ago we brought the curtain down on 30 years of shame and reformed the operations of Bridgewater State Hospital.

Last year, we worked together on an ambitious, comprehensive criminal justice reform package. One that among other things, gives us more tools to help the men and women who'll someday return to our communities get the training, life skills and support they need to succeed upon their release.

But our work here is not done.

In deciding whether or not it makes sense to hold a dangerousness hearing, current law requires a judge to ignore any previous criminal history and to focus only on the crime before the court. Moreover, the list of crimes for which a prosecutor is allowed to make that request is quite narrow.

Too often, dangerous career criminals are arrested only to be released as soon as they appear in court. This sort of revolving door serves to undermine people's faith in law enforcement and the courts. And it's a threat to public safety.

Nobody wants to see someone's life ruined over a small-time lapse in judgment. The law we worked on together last year addresses many of those issues.

But, we still need a common sense approach that provides the system with the ability to schedule a dangerousness hearing when individuals with violent histories come before the court.

Yarmouth Police Sergeant Sean Gannon, Weymouth Police Sergeant Michael Chesna, Auburn Police Officer Ron Tarentino and State Trooper Thomas Clardy all gave their lives carrying out their sworn duty, protecting the people of this Commonwealth.

Here with us today are Yarmouth Police Chief Frank Frederickson, Weymouth Police Chief Richard Grimes, Auburn Police Chief Andrew Sluckis and Superintendent of the Massachusetts State Police Colonel Kerry Gilpin.

We owe it to them, to their brothers and sisters in law enforcement and to our citizens to ensure that we're doing all we can to keep dangerous people off of our streets.

Massachusetts is also a national leader in health care. We're one of the healthiest states in the nation. And we have the highest rate of health care coverage.

Our health care cluster is a wonder, economically and clinically. It's constantly delivering solutions to some of the most urgent and challenging problems facing patients and their families.

The flip side is the price we pay.

Small businesses in Massachusetts have among the highest health insurance costs in the country. The price for the same medical service can vary by as much as 300% depending on where it's provided.

Our community hospitals continue to struggle. And, ironically, some of the Commonwealth's rules make it tough to practice modern medicine.

Later this year, we will file legislation to address these issues. By expanding the use of telemedicine, rethinking some of our scope of practice guidelines and dealing with the parity issues that have negatively affected individuals and families dealing with mental health issues.

On opioid addiction we've made great progress. But we didn't get into this crisis overnight and we won't get out of it overnight either.

The members of this Legislature have been true partners on this issue, enacting two major bills that build on our four pillars of reform: prevention, education, treatment and recovery.

Not all that long ago, families, providers and first responders had virtually no hope. Today, we're one of a handful of states that can say that overdose deaths have dropped since 2017.

There are interventions and policy changes that have worked and others that show promise.

We also added initiatives like credentialed recovery coaches that will be coming online throughout 2019 and beyond.

Dealing with opioid addiction is enormously difficult. Relapse is an inevitable part of the story. Helping people avoid becoming addicted in the first place remains a challenge.

And defusing the presence of fentanyl, which is now present in 90% of all drug overdose deaths, is an enormous challenge.

On behalf of the people of this Commonwealth and especially the families and family members who deal with this addiction every single day, thank you for your support as the Commonwealth battles this deadly disease.

On the afternoon of September 13th, a series of explosions rocked Greater Lawrence resulting in one of the biggest disasters in the history of the Merrimack Valley. Dozens of house fires broke out across the region and one young man tragically lost his life.

Fire and police teams from across Massachusetts and New Hampshire raced to and spread out across Lawrence, North Andover and Andover, putting out fires and directing and re-directing traffic. They worked closely with the Red Cross, local non-profits, state officials and the leadership of the three communities to get people safely out of their homes and if they had no place to go, into a shelter.

For the next 90 days there was an army of operators, tradespeople, first responders, inspectors and state and local officials working throughout the three affected communities: to lay down 50 miles of new mainline pipe, replace thousands of service lines into houses, businesses and apartment buildings and repair or replace thousands of hot water heaters, stoves, dryers and boilers.

It was an enormous and complex undertaking.

Throughout this ordeal, homeowners, families and businesses affected by this disaster showed a tremendous amount of patience, resilience, flexibility and fortitude.

There were hundreds of local officials and elected leaders who went above and beyond the call on this one.

But I want to give special mention and thanks to several local officials that are here with us today, Lawrence Mayor Dan Rivera, Fire Chief Brian Moriarty and Police Chief Roy Vasque. Andover Town Manager Andrew Flanagan, Fire Chief Michael Mansfield and Police Chief Patrick Keefe. And North Andover Town Manager Andrew Maylor, Fire Chief William McCarthy and Police Chief Charles Gray.

These leaders really delivered and we're honored to have them here with us today.

"It's in moments like this that everyone remembers why committed and creative public service matters.

At the same time, the day to day work often goes on without much notice.

The fact that 351 cities and towns in this Commonwealth have worked with state government on over 800 best practices and now use that program to spread the word on other smarter ways to deliver services doesn't make much news.

The work we've done together to invest billions of dollars in housing, downtown and regional economic development and public/private partnerships in communities across the Commonwealth are stories that come and go.

The 16,000 trees we've planted and thousands of LED lights we've installed with our colleagues in local government is just doing our job.

Each day, the wheels turn, and when they turn well they build strong communities. Support great schools. Grow the economy. Clean up the environment. Promote justice. And give people a chance.

Those wheels create hope, opportunity and possibility.

Sure, there's noise. Tons of it. Most of the time that back and forth is positive. It's people offering a point of view with heart and intelligence in a democracy designed to encourage it.

But these days, too much of what pretends to be debate is just rhetoric or character assassination. And every time someone joins that chorus they steal time, attention and focus away from finding common ground, creating solutions and doing the work that matters.

Whether it's the grind of the day to day, or a crisis, we all need to work together because that's what great public service is all about.

During the winter of 2015, I saw firsthand during the snowstorms how amazing this nation's mutual aid programs between states can be. Other states bailed us out as the snow kept falling with no end in sight.

And during the first chaotic and terrifying 24 hours of the Merrimack Valley disaster, the number of first responders who just dropped whatever they were doing and headed there was amazing.

That's public service and people appreciate it.

Over the past four years, the Lieutenant Governor and I have heard time and time again that the way we all work together is a model for the nation.

People like our collaborative approach to governing. And they say they're proud to be from Massachusetts!

And so am I!

This state is bursting with talent, humor and decency. Boldness and common sense. Our abiding sense of patriotism, belonging and community has made us strong and has carried us forward for almost 400 years.

Let others engage in cheap shots and low blows. Let's make our brand of politics positive and optimistic, instead of cruel and dark.

And instead of the bickering and name calling that dominates much of today's public debate, let's build on the work of those who came before us.

And make our work about how we can make this great state better for the people who call this glorious place 'home.'

God Bless This Commonwealth.

God Bless the United States of America.