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SENATOR ELDRIDGE FY14 BUDGET AMENDMENTS FOCUS ON AFFORDABLE HOUSING, WATER INFRASTRUCTURE, CORPORATE ACCOUNTABILITY

FY14 Senate budget debate to begin this week

BOSTON-- Senator Jamie Eldridge (D-Acton) today announced critical amendments to the fiscal year 2014 Senate budget proposal that will provide vital funding in areas of affordable housing, water infrastructure and greater accountability for corporate special interests. Senator Eldridge's amendments include proposals to preserve housing assistance for low-income families, protect the public drinking water supply, provide greater accountability for corporate discretionary tax credits and strengthen Massachusetts casino law oversight.

"I'm extremely proud to sponsor amendments that will improve a broad scope of areas that will fund vital services and programs that will improve economic growth in every region of the Commonwealth and the overall wellbeing of families," said Senator Eldridge. "I look forward to the beginning of a thoughtful budget deliberation process that will adequately address the diverse needs of the entire Commonwealth."

The amendments below include a handful of proposals Senator Eldridge has filed to the FY14 Senate budget proposal. Senator Eldridge has also co-sponsored amendments in the areas of public education, human services, workforce training, assistance to the poor, arts and tourism and early education, among others.

Housing

#282 HomeBASE Rental Assistance (7004-0108): This amendment would ensure that families losing their HomeBASE vouchers by the end of FY14 will not become homeless. It would provide household assistance and any other flexible funding that can help families stabilize their housing. It would also enable families to access the emergency shelter safety net if necessary.

#281 Subsidized Housing Preference and Rental Assistance (7004-0099): This amendment will provide further assistance to families transitioning off of HomeBASE rental assistance by allowing them to maintain their preference for subsidized housing.

More than 5,000 low-income families participating in the state's HomeBASE program will lose their rental assistance in FY14 and may be at risk of becoming homeless again. The Senate Ways and Means budget proposal provides additional critical funding for sustainable housing programs and solutions. The Senate budget proposes \$15.5 million additional funding for the Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program (MRVP). It also proposes \$2.3 million in new funding for Residential Assistance for Families in Transition (RAFT), and \$1.7 million in new funding for Housing Consumer Education Centers and the Tenancy Preservation Program, necessary investments for the prevention of homelessness.

#284 Housing Preservation and Stabilization Trust Fund (OS): This amendment would establish the mechanism for a trust fund, proposed in the Governor's budget and in the final House budget, to be funded with recaptured savings from other housing line items. The trust fund would ensure that these savings would be directed toward effective housing programs and would give DHCD the necessary tools to address housing needs.

Corporate Accountability

#17 Accountability for Discretionary Tax Credits (OS): This amendment, which is based on the recommendations from the Tax Expenditure Commission Report, would ensure that discretionary, "grant-like" tax credits (those awarded on an application basis) are administered according to best practices. This amendment would require the state to "clawback" the discretionary tax credit if the company fails to keep its promise. Because discretionary tax credits work like grants, the state should hold recipients accountable for keeping their promises.

#154 Mass. Gaming Commission (OS): This amendment would add language to the Massachusetts casino law to provide that a prospective applicant for development in a community must send a letter of interest to the Mass. Gaming Commission and the community before engaging in discussions about development proposals with a city or town official. This amendment is the result of two slot parlor proposals in Littleton and Boxborough that were put forward by out of state companies with little public notice.

Water Infrastructure

#193 Drinking Water Supply Protection Grant Program (2200-0100): This amendment would provide funding for EEA's Drinking Water Supply Protection grant program, which provides recipients with funds needed for the purchase of land or interest in land for the protection of public drinking water supplies. The Water Infrastructure Finance Commission, of which Senator Eldridge co-chaired, found that Massachusetts faces a substantial gap between current revenue levels and what is needed to address the backlog of critical investments in our existing drinking water, wastewater, and storm water systems, as well as to address new infrastructure investments. One of the recommendations that resulted from this funding was to protect and restore critical land and water resources.

The Senate begins debate today on the budget proposal with 725 amendments proposed by members.