

Fiscal Year 2023 Budget Conference Report Top 10 highlights

The Fiscal Year 2023 (FY23) conference report presents a budget that leverages the state's strong revenue growth to make historic investments in early education and care, K-12 schools, low-income assistance, and behavioral health. Below are highlights of the conference report.

1. Builds long-term economic security for the Commonwealth.

Leveraging the historic tax revenue performance in Fiscal Year 2022 (FY22), the final FY23 conference report is a \$52.708 billion spending plan that increases revenue assumptions by \$2.66 billion over the December consensus revenue projection for a new tax revenue projection of \$39.575 billion.

The conference report further strengthens the Stabilization Fund, with a \$1.46 billion deposit, bringing it to a historic balance of \$7.35 billion for this crucial 'rainy day' fund at the end of the fiscal year. This ensures a strong fiscal foundation for our Commonwealth to weather future economic disruption.

2. Makes historic investments in early education and child care.

The FY23 conference reports provides historic levels of funding in early education that will both help stabilize the sector and strengthen it. Early education investments include:

- \$250 million for the Commonwealth Cares for Children (C3) Stabilization Grants, stabilizing the early education and care sector by supporting critical operational and workforce needs of providers,
- \$175 million for a newly created **High-Quality Education and Care Affordability Fund**, to be utilized in the coming years to support the implementation of initiatives to promote a high-quality education and care system and recommendations made by the Early Education and Care Economic Review Commission,
- \$60 million in rate increases for subsidized child care providers,
- \$31.5 million for expanded access to Head Start programming and preschool opportunities for children and low-income families in underserved areas, and
- \$25 million to bolster the statewide system of care and assist families in navigating the early education landscape.

3. Fulfills its promise to K-12 schools and boosts local aid.

Delivering on our promise to stay the course and implement the Student Opportunity Act (SOA) by FY 2027, the FY23 conference report includes nearly \$6 billion in Chapter 70 funding — an increase of \$495 million over FY22 — and doubles minimum Chapter 70 aid from \$30 to \$60 per pupil.

With this record level of investment, along with transferring \$150 million to the Student Opportunity Act Investment fund, bringing its balance up to \$500 million, we remain well positioned to deliver on the promise of high-quality public education.

The FY23 conference report also includes \$1.231 billion in funding for Unrestricted General Government Aid (UGGA), an increase of \$63 million over FY22, and \$45 million in payments in lieu of taxes (PILOT) for state-owned land, an increase of \$10 million over FY22, providing cities and town with necessary resources to provide essential services to their constituents.

4. Supports families struggling with the rising cost of living.

The FY23 conference report includes many supports for low-income families struggling to afford the basics in the face of increasing costs. These include:

- Increasing the annual child clothing allowance to \$400 per child, so eligible families can buy clothes for the upcoming year,
- A 10 percent increase to Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children (TAFDC) and Emergency Aid to the Elderly, Disabled and Children (EAEDC) benefit levels, compared to June 2022, providing much needed cash assistance for families, elders and persons with disabilities, and
- \$115 million for a year-long extension of universal school meals, providing immediate relief to working families by saving them up to \$1,200 every year.

5. Take a multi-pronged approach to community-based mental health and substance use disorder services in the Commonwealth.

The FY23 conference report invests

- \$218.2 million for substance use disorder and intervention services provided by the Bureau of Substance Addiction Services,
- \$113 million for children's mental health services, and
- \$28.3 million for Family Resource Centers to grow and improve the mental health resources and programming available to families,
- \$20 million for the Behavioral Health, Access, Outreach and Support Trust Fund to support targeted behavioral health initiatives,
- \$15 million for emergency department diversion initiatives for children, adolescents, and adults,
- \$8.2 million to support student behavioral health services at the University of Massachusetts, state universities and community colleges, and

- \$6 million for Social Emotional Learning Grants (SEL) for help K-12 schools bolster SEL supports for students, including \$1 million for a new pilot program to provide mental health screening for K-12 kids.

In addition, the FY23 conference report confronts the mental health crisis in Massachusetts head on by creating the **Behavioral Health Access and Crisis Intervention Trust Fund**, which will fund crisis supports and a new behavioral health crisis hotline.

The conference report also expands a pilot for medically-assisted treatment of opioid use disorder from five sheriff's departments to all 14 sheriff's departments.

6. Sends a strong and unequivocal message that the rights of women and the LGBTQ community will be protected in the Commonwealth.

The FY23 conference report includes \$2 million in grants for improvements to reproductive health access, infrastructure, and safety, ensuring health care providers remain protected in the face of growing legal uncertainty across the nation.

The conference report includes over \$2.75 million in funding for LGBTQ initiatives, ensuring access to gender affirming health care, youth-at-risk programming, and stable housing.

Additionally, the conference report includes a provision establishing a veteran equality review board to ensure that veterans dishonorably discharged under 'Don't Ask Don't Tell' receive state-based veterans' benefits.

7. Makes significant investments in housing stability and homelessness programs.

The FY23 budget includes significant resources for housing stability programs to keep individuals and families in their homes and assistance to help those experiencing homelessness, including:

- \$219.4 million for Emergency Assistance Family Shelters,
- \$210 million for Residential Assistance for Families in Transition (RAFT),
- \$175 million for the Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program (MRVP),
- \$110 million for shelters for homeless individuals, and
- \$92 million for assistance to local housing authorities.

The conference report also upholds the emergency-level maximum amount of rental assistance that a household can receive at \$10,000 and requires the Department of Housing and Community Development to study and report on the execution of no-fault evictions between 2019 and 2022. The conference report also moves to a more generous payment standard for the MRVP program to help families better afford their rent.

8. Ensures incarcerated people will not bear the cost of staying connected to loved ones or pay marked-up costs for basic items.

The FY23 conference report removes barriers to communication services for incarcerated persons and their loved ones, requiring the Department of Correction (DOC), sheriffs and the Department of Youth Services (DYS) to provide phone calls, video calls, and other electronic communications free of charge to the callers.

The report also includes a new requirement that commissary items, such as food or hygiene products, in correctional facilities shall not be sold at more than three per cent over the purchase cost.

Both of these changes in the conference report will ensure that correctional facilities do not unjustly profit off the basic needs of incarcerated persons.

Finally, the conference report also eliminates probation and parole fees, reducing the burden on individuals during their re-entry process.

9. Strengthens Stroke Prevention and Care.

Acknowledging that stroke is a leading cause of long-term disability and death in the United States and Massachusetts, the FY23 conference report includes provisions to establish a comprehensive system of stroke response and care to ensure patients receive appropriate urgent care quickly. The development and implementation of a stroke system of care will designate a tiered system of care and establish transport protocols for EMS professionals. While many hospitals may be able to treat different types of strokes, we need a stroke system that prioritizes patients' outcomes above all else. With this system of care in place, a person experiencing a stroke will be transported to the nearest trauma center, improving long-term health outcomes and rates of survival.

10. Expands access to higher education opportunities for students with disabilities.

The FY23 conference report includes provisions expanding access to inclusive higher education opportunities for young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities by removing existing barriers.

To ensure full inclusion, students with disabilities would not be required to pass the MCAS, have a high school diploma, meet high school course requirements, or take college entrance exams in order to access inclusive academic, social, and career development opportunities on public higher education campuses with their peers.

In addition, the conference report codifies the existing Massachusetts Inclusive Concurrent Enrollment Initiative (MAICEI) grant program, which supports school

districts and public institutions of higher education partnering together to offer inclusive educational options for students with disabilities.

The conference report also includes \$4 million in resources to support expanded learning options for this diverse student population, including \$1.5 million into a new Massachusetts Inclusive Concurrent Enrollment Initiative Trust Fund.