

MASSACHUSETTS FISCAL ALLIANCE



Press Release

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MassFiscal Sharply Condemns Budget “Gag Orders”

Restricting debate on huge portions of the budget is a clear attack on democracy in Massachusetts

Boston, MA: The Massachusetts Fiscal Alliance today condemned in the strongest possible terms the rules adopted by the House of Representatives on Tuesday to govern debate over the budget. Among a litany of other restrictions, the legislation (H. 3999) prohibits any amendment dealing with local aid for education or transportation and any proposals to reform broken welfare programs, and also gives lawmakers just 48 hours to file amendments to a budget likely to run hundreds if not thousands of pages of length.

“Simply put, these rules are wrong,” stated Paul Craney, executive director of the Massachusetts Fiscal Alliance. **“Speaker DeLeo, Chairman Dempsey, and the rest of the House leadership may not like having to hear about their abject failure to provide adequate funding to cities and towns or to provide real oversight of the scandal-ridden Patrick Administration, but it is downright shameful that they would summarily restrict the rights of their fellow representatives to engage in that debate.”**

During debate over the rules resolution, the House rejected four amendments backed by Minority Leader Brad Jones. Jones' proposals would have limited the practice of sending amendments to be “studied” in order to kill them, allowed amendments on local aid and EBT reform, and given lawmakers an extra five days to submit amendments for consideration. Two amendments were defeated on a straight party-line vote, but in a rare display of independence, Reps. Colleen Garry (D-Dracut) and Jonathan Zlotnik (D-Gardner) joined the entire Republican caucus in supporting the proposals to allow debate on local aid and EBT reform-related amendments. Garry and Zlotnik nonetheless rejoined the rest of their majority-party colleagues in voting for the package as a whole.

“Given the trend identified during the debate toward permitting less and less debate, I’m left wondering whether a few years from now, the Speaker will grant permission to offer any amendments to the budget. This is truly a sad day for Massachusetts,” Craney concluded.

Massachusetts Fiscal Alliance will be updating its scorecard by the end of the week to reflect lawmakers' votes on the amendments to allow discussion of local aid and EBT reform, allow extra time for submitting budget amendments, and final passage of the overall debate resolution.

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