

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Representative Natalie M. Blais

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Chair

The Joint Committee on Agriculture

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Legislation Introduced by State Representative Natalie M. Blais 194th Session (2025-2026)

Agriculture and Farms

An Act promoting equity in agriculture (H.111)

According to the 2017 USDA Census of Agriculture, BIPOC farmers are represented on only 2.3% of the Commonwealth's farms, farms that steward just .3% of the land in farming and sell just .4% of the market value of agricultural goods in Massachusetts, despite people of color making up 29% of the state's population. This refiled bill will establish a commission charged with developing recommendations for MDAR to equitably serve socially disadvantaged farmers to address these disparities. Last session, this legislation was reported favorable out of the Agriculture Committee.

An Act fostering agricultural resilience in Massachusetts "FARM Bill" (H.112)

Farms across Massachusetts struggle to remain financially sustainable, earning just 95 cents for every dollar they spend producing food. This omnibus legislation proposes many policy updates to close this gap by establishing a \$3 million Next Generation Farmers Fund to provide education grants, directing MEMA to incorporate food production capacity into disaster planning, allowing MDAR to protect whole farms in the APR program, establishing a state food system coordinator position, allowing MDAR additional authority as land is being sold, and more.

Proposal for a legislative amendment to the Constitution relative to agricultural and horticultural lands (H.71)

Currently, the Massachusetts Constitution recognizes the importance of agricultural production by allowing farmland to be taxed at a lower rate, compared to commercial or residential land. However, farmland must be at least five acres to qualify under this provision. This proposal allows farms with less than 5 acres of land to qualify after 2 years of agricultural usage, enabling many urban farms and beginning farmers to access the tax benefit.

An Act to enhance agricultural operations (H.3627)

This bill would allow All-Terrain Vehicles (ATVs) used in agriculture to utilize public ways without a registration in the same way that tractors, trailers and other farm vehicles are allowed to be used without a registration, and with the same limitations. As with other farm vehicles, liability insurance would be required if traveling more than half a mile from the farm.

Democracy and Transparency

An Act relative to access to statements of financial interest (H.3294)

Many other states in New England including Maine, New York, Rhode Island and New Hampshire, provide online access to public officials' statements of financial interests. Massachusetts also provides online access but requires an online request before gaining access to this information. This legislation eliminates the need to fill out a form, thereby bringing Massachusetts in line with other New England states.

An Act relative to Gender Neutral Language in Elections Law (H.804)

Chapter 53 governs Massachusetts elections laws. There are over 180 mentions of he, him, his, chairman, chairmen, alderman and aldermen in this chapter alone. Our laws should reflect who we are as a Commonwealth. This legislation aims to replace these terms with gender neutral language.

An Act relative to candidate information on ballots (H.803)

Massachusetts is the only state in the nation to list the complete home addresses of candidates on ballots. While some states require the listing of a candidate's hometown on the ballot, the majority simply require the candidate's party affiliation. This legislation aligns the Commonwealth with other states by removing the requirement that a candidate's street address must appear on the ballot.

Economic Development

An Act to establish the Office of Outdoor Recreation (HD.902)

The Office of Outdoor Recreation was created in 2022 by the outgoing Baker-Polito Administration. This bill aims to codify this office into law.

An Act to promote jobs and economic growth in tourism (H.3031)

The MA Tourism Trust Fund has not been updated in 10 years. This legislation would add 2.5% of the occupancy excise tax each year to the \$10 million tourism trust fund baseline so that the Commonwealth can better market all that we have to offer visitors, thereby fueling economic development.

Education

An Act to provide a sustainable future for rural schools (H.517)

Rural school districts in Massachusetts face unique and long-standing fiscal challenges. The Student Opportunity Act of 2019 acknowledged the need for the state to examine this area in further detail and established the *Commission on the Long-term Fiscal Health of Rural School Districts* for that purpose. This omnibus bill builds on the [commission's 36 recommendations](#) and serves as a continuation of the work of the Student Opportunity Act. Passage of this legislation will ensure students in every corner of the Commonwealth receive the resources and opportunity they deserve.

Energy and Environment

An Act protecting consumers from unreasonable utility rate increases (H.3452)

Current rules allow utilities in Massachusetts to make higher profits off of consumers than utilities in other states. This legislation protects electricity and gas consumers by eliminating automatic annual rate hikes and limiting the return on equity that utilities can earn to no more than the average of neighboring states.

An Act relative to solar and battery decommissioning and recycling (H.904)

The majority of U.S. states require that a decommissioning plan be submitted before the construction of a solar voltaic project, detailing what steps will be taken to return the land to its original state. In addition, many states require a financial assurance in addition to, or as a part of, these decommissioning plans. As of October 2023, only five states with solar decommissioning policies do not specifically require a financial assurance: Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Rhode Island, and Wyoming. This legislation directs the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection to develop a comprehensive statewide plan for the management of end-of-life solar voltaic panels and energy storage system batteries that includes both refurbishing and complete decommissioning.

An Act providing nature for all (H901) - Co-Filed with Rep. Sam Montano

This bill establishes a dedicated source of annual public funding to conserve land, water, and urban greenspace through the existing sales tax on sporting goods. By creating this fund, Massachusetts can direct approximately \$100 million annually to help meet our land protection and climate goals.

An Act protecting drinking water quality in private wells (H.900)

More than half a million Massachusetts residents, located heavily in rural areas but also in all 351 cities and towns, rely on private wells for their drinking water. Unlike public water systems, there are no statewide protections to ensure these wells are safe from contaminants such as PFAS, arsenic, radon, uranium and more. This legislation grants the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection the authority to establish safe standards and define testing requirements for new and existing wells, including but not limited to, at the time of the sale of homes with private wells used for drinking water (comparable to the state's Title 5 septic system regulations).

An Act Relative to Sustainable and Equitable Funding for Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation (H.938) - Co-Filed with Rep. Pat Duffy

This legislation ensures that the Commonwealth's climate change goals and associated funding programs are equitable and prioritize those communities who are first and worst impacted by climate change, especially Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and people of color, low-income low-wealth residents, and English isolated residents.

An Act expanding community access to electric bicycles (H.3451)

Modeled after the successful Denver, Colorado program, the Community Access to Electric Bicycles Grant Initiative will help finance bike share programs and ownership programs that municipalities, businesses, and nonprofit organizations administer.

An Act authorizing the establishment of old growth forest reserves (H.903)

Old-growth forests are extremely rare. Although Massachusetts has over 3 million acres of forested land, only about 3,600 acres of this is original, old-growth forest. This legislation requires the Commonwealth to establish a permanent system of old growth forest reserves, including "buffer areas" adjacent to old growth forests.

Health and Public Safety

An Act relative to rate equity for community health centers (H.1096)

Community Health centers not only receive lower payment from commercial plans than they do from MassHealth, but they are also reimbursed less than non-health center office-based practices; only 65% of what plans pay other office-based practices for a physician visit. This legislation will help health centers in Massachusetts remain financially sound and sustainable by codifying the Prospective Payment System (PPS) methodology for federally qualified health centers (FQHCs). This will guard against potential (federal) political risk leading to loss of federal legal protections and ensure that Massachusetts adheres to these federal requirements.

An Act relative to menstrual product ingredient disclosure (H2375)

As part of their Civic Action Project, several Frontier Regional School 8th grade students introduced the idea of this legislation to require menstrual product companies to disclose ingredient information on the packaging of their products. Modeled after bills passed in California and New York, this legislation ensures the public has the information it needs to make informed decisions while also lifting up the voices of young people in our legislative process.

An Act relative to non-membership service in public safety (HD.2760)

Small-town, non professional fire and police departments are unable to work past the age of 65 without obtaining special legislation to do so. Because of demographic shifts in rural western Massachusetts where population is decreasing and getting increasingly older, towns are relying more and more on fire and police members to work past the age of 65. This legislation allows towns the ability to continue the employment of these public safety professionals up to the age of 72 with town approval.

An Act establishing a special commission on paid family and medical leave for public employees (H.2070)

Since the implementation of the Paid Family and Medical Leave (PFML) Act in 2021, employees across Massachusetts have been able to access additional financial and leave benefits to support themselves and family members during health related challenges, and following the birth of their children. However, many public employers; municipal, school districts, and other quasi-public agencies are exempt from the requirements set forth by PFML. This legislation creates a special commission to study the barriers to implementing paid family medical leave in Massachusetts to include all public employees.

An Act regulating surgical assistants (H.327)

This legislation aims to address shortages in the healthcare workforce. Existing regulations under the Board of Registration and Medicine prohibit surgical assistants from working without a license. However, unlike most other states, Massachusetts doesn't have a system to license these individuals. The bill seeks to remedy this problem by establishing a board of registration specific to surgical assistants, as well as requirements for licensure, while also maintaining the ability of nasogastric nurses and other health care professionals to perform surgical assistant duties that fall within the scope of their licenses.

An Act maintaining the state disaster relief and resiliency trust fund (H.3030)

In 2024, the Commonwealth established the Disaster Relief and Resiliency Trust Fund based on legislation that I filed with Senator Jo Comerford to provide financial assistance to municipalities, farms, businesses, and individuals in the wake of a natural disaster. The establishment of this fund was an incredible first step. This bill will strengthen our ability to respond to disasters by establishing a dedicated revenue stream to ensure that when disaster strikes, the Commonwealth has the ability to quickly respond and support our communities in their time of need.

Housing

An Act promoting geographic equity in state-funded housing development (H.1471)

This legislation requires the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities (EOHLC) to provide a public report on all funding and housing production resulting from the Affordable Homes Act (AHA), as well as any other state funding distributed for housing production. The bill also requires EOHLC to ensure geographic equity in its scoring criteria for housing projects funded under the state's qualified allocation plan.

Justice Reform

An Act establishing employee screening requirements in schools to prevent child sexual abuse (H.516)

Strengthens hiring and retention policies to screen out individuals who may be a safety risk for children, and to prohibit the practice referred to as "passing the trash" - the aiding and abetting of a school employee engaged in sexual misconduct from securing a position in another school. This legislation would require standardized screening of prospective new school employees who would have to confirm any previous history of sexual misconduct as a prerequisite to hiring.

An Act Relative to Controlling and Abusive Litigation (H.1594)

Individuals who abuse their intimate partners often misuse court proceedings in order to control, harass, intimidate, coerce, and/or impoverish the abused partner. Court proceedings can provide a means for an abuser to exert and reestablish power and control over a domestic violence survivor long after a relationship has ended. This legislation provides the courts with an additional tool to curb controlling and abusive litigation and to mitigate the harms that this litigation perpetuates.

An Act protecting minors from the creation of computer-generated child sexual abuse visual materials (H.1593)

This legislation is intended to address the exponentially growing problem of online child sexual abuse material (CSAM). If passed, it will help to enable prosecution of people for developing and sharing sexually explicit images of children that are technologically edited, collaged, morphed or AI-generated.

Municipal Support

An Act to reform payments in lieu of taxes for state-owned land (H.3032)

In December 2020, State Auditor Bump issued a report that found that the Commonwealth's payments in lieu of taxes (PILOT) program for state-owned lands (SOL) is underfunded and disproportionately disadvantages smaller, rural communities in favor of larger, wealthier communities. Per a recommendation in the report, this legislation changes the formula to address this finding. It also adds an ecosystem services payment for the benefits provided by our natural and working lands.

An Act updating emergency management (H.2572)

This bill modernizes the Commonwealth's emergency management framework in order to strengthen preparedness, response, and coordination.

An Act creating a municipal and public safety building authority (H.2571)

Many towns across the Commonwealth do not have the tax base or borrowing ability to upgrade or build new public safety complexes and municipal buildings. This legislation creates an independent public authority, similar to authorities that help finance municipal school buildings and libraries, to provide matching funds for local public safety and municipal buildings.

Transportation

An Act relative to unpaved roads (H.3628)

In many rural communities across the Commonwealth, unpaved roads and paved low volume roads (LVR) constitute a significant portion of the total road miles. Unpaved roads are relatively cheap to construct but require a high annual investment for maintenance. With town budgets stretched to the limit and limited Chapter 90 funding available, it is a struggle for municipalities to fund roadway maintenance and improvements. This legislation instructs the Massachusetts Department of Transportation and the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs to convene a working group to identify and evaluate the safe, efficient and environmentally sound maintenance and improvement of unpaved roads and paved low volume roads (LVR) in the Commonwealth.

An Act facilitating cost-efficient transportation (H.3629)

One of the cost drivers for municipalities operating transfer stations is hauling materials from the site. Multiple trips are currently required due to weight limits imposed on trucks. Trucks safely carrying more materials will save towns from these expensive and unnecessary costs. This legislation allows tandem trucks operating on approved public roads to weigh up to 99,000 lbs if they have a permit, thereby reducing the need for multiple trips and saving towns money.

Veterans

An Act providing for timely reimbursement of cities and towns for veterans' benefits (H.3830)

Our local veterans' services offices provide vital services to veterans living in our communities. This legislation directs the state Veterans' Administration to reimburse municipalities in a more timely manner, so that our municipalities can continue to provide a high level of service to our veterans and not be financially burdened while awaiting reimbursement.

NOTE: The bills listed above were filed by the "timely filed bill" deadline of January 18, 2025. Additional bills will be filed as needed throughout the session as "late filed bills", including home rule petitions.