

Evening Briefs: Session Extension | MassCOP Support | New School \$\$\$

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State House News

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- Senate Agrees to Extend Formal Sessions
- Police Union Cheers Reps Who Opposed Reform Bill
- Baker Directs \$50M from Feds to Reopening Schools, Colleges



Senate Agrees to Extend Formal Sessions

[Coverage Developing] Massachusetts senators unanimously agreed Thursday to continue formal lawmaking business beyond a Friday deadline, giving themselves months more time to wrap up key legislative work that has been disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The Senate voted 40-0 in favor of its own order (S 2873) amending joint legislative rules that prohibit meeting in formal sessions, where roll call votes can be taken and major legislation is typically handled, after July 31. On Wednesday, the House unanimously approved its own version of a session extension order (H 4910). Both versions trigger effectively the same change, though they each contain different language. While both branches have now agreed to push back the deadline that frequently turns the last week of July in even years into a chaotic sprint, the extension is not yet finalized. The House broke for a recess shortly after the Senate took its vote, and it was not immediately clear how the two branches planned to resolve the different orders. - Chris Lisinski/SHNS

Police Union Cheers Reps Who Opposed Reform Bill

The state's largest police union is asking all 4,300 of its uniformed officers and members of the public to support the 66 House legislators who voted last week against a sweeping policing reform bill that the union said would put police and the public at risk. The Massachusetts Coalition of Police, which has members in 157 cities and towns, called it "admirable" and evidence of a "strong intellect" to recognize the problems in the bill and want to slow down the process to study them more closely. "It takes a strong sense of right and wrong to resist the pressure some people are putting on these legislators," the union, led by President Scott Hovsepian, said in a statement. MassCOP said the union was asking all its members and the public to support the House legislators who voted no, "especially

those with challengers in November." The opposition bloc included all 31 House Republicans and 35 Democrats. The union did not specify what about the bill concerned them, but has been critical of attempts to weaken qualified immunity protections from civil lawsuits for police. "Our union has been strongly supportive of responsible police reform, and we have attempted to focus the Legislature on substantive changes that can be implemented immediately. We have also pointed to issues that need more thorough study and debate in order to be fairly and safely administered," the MassCOP statement said. The lawmakers who voted against the bill last week after three days of debate "recognized that there are a number of proposals in these bills that will endanger not only police officers, but the public as well," the union said. - Matt Murphy/SHNS

Baker Directs \$50M from Feds to Reopening Schools, Colleges

Gov. Charlie Baker is allocating \$50 million federal funds to schools and colleges to help with costs associated with reopening, remote learning, early literacy and financial aid for low-income college students, his office announced Thursday. The bulk of the money -- up to \$25 million -- will go toward "COVID-related expenses associated with reopening colleges and universities, as well as certain non-public elementary and secondary schools," according to a press release. That money will be distributed based on the number and percentage of enrolled low-income students. Up to \$10 million will be dedicated to early literacy programs for students through third grade, with the goal of remediating learning loss experienced since the closure of school buildings in March and accelerating skills for kids from high-need communities. As much as \$5 million will be set aside in an emergency reserve, as much as \$7.5 million will be used to expand access to online courses including advanced placement, early college and dual enrollment programs, and up to \$2.5 million will go to financial aid for low-income students of public colleges. "We know districts will need more funding this year than in a typical school year, and I am pleased to see this money added to the financial support that is already on its way to districts," Elementary and Secondary Education Commissioner Jeffrey Riley said in a statement. The funding announcement came the same day the administration announced plans to maintain fiscal 2021 local aid and school aid at last year's levels and provide an additional \$107 million in school aid to cover inflation and enrollment factors. - Katie Lannan/SHNS

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Confirmed cases 109,400

Deaths 8,595

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