



MASSACHUSETTS FOOD ASSOCIATION

UPDATE OF ANNUAL REPORT

DECEMBER 2023

The first year of the two-year legislative session formally ended on November 15. The legislature will continue to meet in informal sessions until it returns after the holidays on January 3. Under legislative rules, any legislation can be "tabled" if taken up during informal sessions by any one legislator who objects, forcing the issue off for discussion until formal sessions return in January. All legislation filed for the present session before the January 20, 2023 filing deadline must be acted upon no later than February 7, 2024 by its respective committee including a "yeah" (ought to pass) vote or a "nay" (ought not to pass) vote before being discharged or administered from its committee. Over 4,600 dockets have been filed in the House and over 2,800 filed in the Senate as of December 1. MFA has reviewed all legislation filed for the new session and continuously reviews any new bills filed after the January deadline. These proposals are referred to as "late file" bills and do not always make the established hearing already scheduled by subject matter, they must be heard separately. MFA continues to monitor the House and Senate Clerk offices for late filed legislation. So far, the association has approximately 300 priority bills it is tracking through the new session.

Below is an update of the association's legislative activities and developments of the first year of our two-year legislative session since MFA's Annual Report was distributed in October.

TESTIMONY SUBMITTED

MINIMUM WAGE INCREASE [H1925/S1200](#) - MFA submitted testimony in **opposition** to legislation proposing an increase in the state's minimum wage. Both bills propose an increase in the state's present minimum wage of \$15/hour to \$20/hour over the next four years with \$1.25 increases each year. Additional wage increases would then be tied to the consumer price index.

BOTTLE DEPOSIT EXPANSION [H4032](#) - MFA submitted testimony in **opposition** to legislation that would have expanded the definition of "beverage containers" subject to the state's forced deposit law to include all "...soda water or similar carbonated soft drinks, mineral water, water and alcoholic beverages ... but shall not include dairy products or natural fruit juices".

LEGISLATIVE ISSUES UNDER CONSIDERATION AS 1ST YEAR ENDS

SALARY RANGE TRANSPARENCY [H4109/S2484](#)

PROPOSAL: Each bill essentially requires employers with 25 or more employees to disclose pay ranges when posting a job opening or offering certain promotions or transfers. Companies with 100 or more employees would be required to file copies of their federally-required equal employment data reports with the Massachusetts state secretary's office.

STATUS: Both bills were swiftly approved by each branch and sent to a Conference Committee in late October to reach a final compromise proposal for passage.

DISCOUNT COUPONS [H4154](#)

PROPOSAL: Would require any store offering digital coupons: to make available a paper coupon of identical value; apply digital coupons to the purchases of any buyer 65 years old or older upon the presentation of identification; apply all available digital coupons to the consumer's purchase upon presenting a store card when requested by the consumer asking a store cashier or a customer service representative if the store offers digital coupons.

STATUS: This proposal was a "late file" bill and was recently referred to the Joint Committee on Consumer Protection and Professional Licensure in late October. To date it remains before the Committee with no hearing scheduled yet.

PRESCRIPTION DRUG COSTS [S2520](#)

PURPOSE: The bill seeks to reduce or eliminate prescription costs for people with chronic illnesses. It would require pharmacy benefit managers to be licensed, empower the Center for Health Information and Analysis to more closely examine prescription drugs, give the Health Policy Commission new tools to control high prices, and create a fund to help cover costs for lower-income patients. The proposal features a provision capping out-of-pocket costs for some medications that treat chronic illnesses at \$25 for name-brand versions and at \$0 for generic alternatives.

STATUS: The Senate passed the bill on November 15 (the last day of the session's 1st year), it is now before the House Ways and Means Committee.

SNAP FUNDING IN SUPPLEMENTAL BUDGET [H4204](#)

PURPOSE: The "closeout supplemental budget" contains language that would:

Allocate \$1,000,000 for reimbursement to clients who had their federal SNAP payments stolen through EBT card skimming, cloning or other similar fraudulent methods, including organized identity theft schemes between October 1, 2022 through June 30, 2024, to the extent that federal funds will not cover the cost of reimbursement.

Allocate \$6,000,000 for SNAP benefits for eligible persons that do not meet immigration status but reside in the commonwealth in effect until funding is fully expended.

Fund additional costs through FY '24 to the Department of Transitional Assistance in order to meet increased client demand for SNAP and other aid programs.

STATUS: After weeks of discussions, the proposal was signed by the Governor into law on Monday, December 4 minutes after receiving it from the legislature.

AN ACT PROTECTING THE RIGHT TO VOTING [H4217](#)

PURPOSE: Allows for paid time off to vote with a three-day notice, requires sign posting of rights.

STATUS: - The House passed the bill on December 14 and is now before Senate Ways and Means.

2024 BALLOT QUESTIONS

Proponents of initiative petitions completed the first round of signature gathering on November 22, advancing their questions to appear before voters on next year's state ballot. To continue the petition process advocates must have collected at least 74,574 signatures from registered voters (the equivalent of 3% of the voter turnout in the last gubernatorial election) approved by local registrars and then to the Secretary of State by December 6. After the necessary number of signatures have been certified by the Secretary, he transmits the initiative petition to the House Clerk by January 3 for legislative action. If the legislature fails to act by April 30, 2024, proponents may request additional signature forms for a second round of signature gathering. They must collect an additional 12,429 signatures between May 1 and June 18. On December 6 the Secretary of State [announced](#) he expected 11 petitions to be filed, including 5 different versions of a proposed law relating to the relationship between app-based drivers and network companies. Others expected to be filed seek to do away with the MCAS test as a graduation requirement; give the state auditor [explicit authority to audit the state Legislature](#); gradually bring the minimum wage for tipped workers into line with the general minimum wage, and; legalize psychedelics.

SURTAX UPDATE

MILLIONAIRES TAX

The MASSGrant Plus expansion will use \$62 million to increase financial aid for about 25,000 lowest and middle-income students, retroactive to the start of the fall 2023 semester. DOR estimates that FY '24 surtax revenue is forecasted to be between \$1.578 billion and \$2.060 billion. Estimates were originally set at \$1 billion for FY '24. FY '25 estimates are between \$1.777 billion and \$2.127 billion, Click [FAQs](#) for information about the 4% surtax on taxable income over \$1,000,000.