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## Boston's 2011-2012 Legislative Package

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### *Reform of municipal healthcare tops the list of bills submitted*

The Mayor's legislative package for the 2011-2012 session of the General Court consists of 45 bills as well as six home rule petitions. Many of the bills are re-files of bills previously submitted but 16 bills are new. The bills are divided among nine broad categories such as governmental efficiencies, public education economic development/job growth, housing and municipal revenues. This article summarizes a few of the new bills/petitions.

**Top Priority - Healthcare Reform** - Of all these bills and petitions, the City's top priority is to achieve reform of municipal healthcare. Facing a fourth year of local aid cuts in FY12 and escalating employee health insurance costs, the #1 priority for all municipal officials is to achieve greater control over healthcare costs. Both Governor Patrick and the Massachusetts Municipal Association, have filed separate bills to change the current system.

The Mayor's bill takes a different tact and would authorize municipalities to establish local Group Insurance Commissions (GIC). The local GIC Board would have the same membership mix of administrative and labor members and have administrative control over plan design including plan selection, co-pays and deductibles. This bill would take management of health insurance out of collective bargaining as the state did for itself in 1955.

**Governmental Efficiencies** - A home rule petition would increase the threshold for a formal contract process with Mayoral approval from

\$10,000 to \$25,000 to be consistent with the state requirements under the Uniform Procurement Act.

**Public Education** - The City has filed a bill to allow a larger percentage of special education students as a share of total enrollment to be used in the Ch.70 school aid distribution formula. The bill also would increase the special education "circuit-breaker" reimbursement for high cost students. The state has been reimbursing the City for 40% of higher costs, not the 75% authorized subject to appropriation.

**Economic Development** - A bill would allow further construction and development of hotels within the Convention Center Finance District south of Summer Street. The lack of adequate hotel rooms close to the convention center is a concern to convention planners because of the high transportation costs incurred transporting members from hotels far from the convention center in South Boston.

**Municipal Revenue** - A bill would allow for the taxation of hotel rooms sold online. Online resellers are currently exempt from collecting taxes when selling retail. The state Department of Revenue filed this bill previously.

**Public Safety** - To curb gun violence, a bill would establish a mandatory sentence of five years for possession of a firearm for any convicted felon previously sentenced for a felony for 10 or more years.