

Acts (2020)

Chapter 53

AN ACT TO ADDRESS CHALLENGES FACED BY MUNICIPALITIES AND STATE AUTHORITIES RESULTING FROM COVID-19.

Whereas, The deferred operation of this act would tend to defeat its purposes, which are to make certain changes in law in response to a public health emergency, each of which is immediately necessary to carry out to accomplish important public purposes, therefore it is hereby declared to be an emergency law, necessary for the immediate preservation of the public health and convenience.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Court assembled, and by the authority of the same, as follows:

SECTION 1. Section 9 of chapter 39 of the General Laws, as appearing in the 2018 Official Edition, is hereby amended by striking out, in lines 13 to 14, the word “thirtieth” and inserting in place thereof the following words:- 30 except in the event of an emergency that poses an immediate threat to the health or safety of persons or property that prevents the completion of the business of the delayed town meeting on or before June 30 if the governor has declared a state of emergency with respect to such emergency.

SECTION 2. Subsection (a) of section 10A of said chapter 39, as so appearing, is hereby amended by striking out the first sentence and inserting in place thereof the following 2 sentences:- Notwithstanding any general or special law, charter provision or by-law to the contrary, during and for a period of 5 days after the termination of any weather-related, public safety or public health emergency, the town moderator or person designated to perform the duties of town moderator may, in consultation with local public safety or public health officials and the board of selectmen, recess and continue a town meeting previously called pursuant to a warrant issued pursuant to section 10 to a time, date and place certain; provided, however, that any such recess and continuance period shall not exceed 30 days. The moderator or person designated to perform the duties of town moderator may renew the declaration of recess and

continuance period for up to 30 days at a time but not more than 30 days following the date of rescission of a state of emergency declared by the governor. If a town does not have a moderator, the board of selectmen may recess and continue town meeting in accordance with this paragraph.

SECTION 3. Said section 10A of said chapter 39, as so appearing, is hereby further amended by striking out subsection (c).

SECTION 4. Said section 10A of said chapter 39, as so appearing, is hereby further amended by striking out subsection (d) and inserting in place thereof the following subsection:-

(d) Within 10 days after the initial declaration of recess and continuance of a town meeting pursuant to this section, a local public safety or public health official designated by the board of selectmen shall submit a report to the attorney general providing the justification for the declaration.

SECTION 5. The first paragraph of section 31 of chapter 44 of the General Laws, as so appearing, is hereby amended by inserting after the second sentence the following 2 sentences:- If the declared emergency prevents the adoption of an annual budget by a town or district by the June 30 preceding the start of the fiscal year, the board of selectmen, town council or district commissioners shall notify the director and the director may approve expenditures, from any appropriate fund or account, of an amount sufficient for the operations of the town or district during the month of July not less than 1/12 of the total budget approved by the town or district in the most recent fiscal year pursuant to a plan approved by the board of selectmen, town council or district commissioners and such authority shall continue for each successive month while the emergency continues to prevent the adoption of a budget. The director may promulgate and revise rules or regulations regarding the approval of emergency expenditures described in this section and accounting with regard to such expenditures.

SECTION 6. Notwithstanding any general or special law to the contrary, if the adoption of an annual budget in a city, town or district is delayed beyond June 30, 2020, as a result of the governor's March 10, 2020 declaration of a state of emergency or the outbreak of the 2019 novel coronavirus, also known as COVID-19, the director of accounts of the department of revenue may authorize the appropriation from the available balance of the city's, town's or district's undesignated fund balance or "free cash" certified by the director under section 23 of chapter 59 of the General Laws as of July 1, 2019, as a funding source for the city's, town's or district's fiscal year 2021 expenditures, including, but not limited to, any such undesignated fund balance in an enterprise fund or special revenue account. The director of accounts may promulgate and revise rules or regulations regarding the implementation of this section.

SECTION 7. Notwithstanding section 31 of chapter 44 of the General Laws, section 23 of chapter 59 of the General Laws or any other general or special law to the contrary, a city, town or district may amortize over fiscal years 2021 to 2023, inclusive, in equal installments or more

rapidly, the amount of its fiscal year 2020 deficit resulting from the outbreak of the 2019 novel coronavirus, also known as COVID-19, as described in the governor's March 10, 2020 declaration of a state of emergency, including, but not limited to, any such deficit in an enterprise fund or special revenue account. The local appropriating authority as defined in section 21C of said chapter 59 and, in the case of a district, the prudential committee or commissioners, or as otherwise defined in the General Laws, shall adopt a deficit amortization schedule in accordance with the preceding sentence before setting the city's, town's or district's fiscal year 2021 tax rate. The commissioner of revenue may issue guidelines or instructions for reporting the amortization of deficits authorized by this section.

SECTION 8. Notwithstanding any general or special law to the contrary, as a result of the outbreak of the 2019 novel coronavirus, also known as COVID-19, and the governor's March 10, 2020 declaration of a state of emergency, for fiscal year 2021, a city or town may expend from each revolving fund, established under section 53E1/2 of chapter 44 of the General Laws an amount not to exceed the amount authorized to be expended in fiscal year 2020 until the city or town adopts an annual budget for fiscal year 2021 at which time, the legislative body of the city or town shall also vote on the total amount that may be expended from each revolving fund in fiscal year 2021.

SECTION 9. Notwithstanding section 8 of chapter 61 of the General Laws, section 14 of chapter 61A of the General Laws, section 9 of chapter 61B of the General Laws or any other general or special law, charter provision, ordinance or by-law to the contrary, during and for a period of 90 days after the termination of the governor's March 10, 2020 declaration of a state of emergency, all time periods within which any municipality is required to act, respond, effectuate or exercise an option to purchase shall be suspended.

SECTION 10. (a) Notwithstanding any general or special law to the contrary, as a result of the outbreak of the 2019 novel coronavirus, also known as COVID-19, and the governor's March 10, 2020 declaration of a state of emergency, for fiscal year 2020, the chief executive officer of a city or town, as defined in clause Fifth B of section 7 of chapter 4 of the General Laws, or a district may extend:

- (i) for the purposes of the first paragraph of section 57 of chapter 59 of the General Laws, the date May 1 to a date not later than June 1, 2020;
- (ii) for the purposes of the seventh and eighth paragraphs and the tenth and eleventh paragraphs of section 57C of said chapter 59, the date May 1 to a date not later than June 1, 2020;
- (iii) for the purposes of the seventh paragraph of said section 57C of said chapter 59, the date April 1 to a date not later than June 1, 2020; and
- (iv) for the purposes of the third paragraph of said section 59 of said chapter 59, the date April 1 to a date not later than June 1, 2020.