



State Universities
of Massachusetts

CoP Remarks on Behalf of the State University System to the Board of Higher Education

December 13, 2022

Introduction

Good Morning, Chairman Gabrieli, Secretary Peyser, Commissioner Ortega and members of the Board of Higher Education. On behalf of the State Universities Council of Presidents, thank you for this opportunity to provide you with an update on the Massachusetts State University System.

I would like to open my remarks by thanking Secretary Peyser for your years of public service as our Secretary of Education. Thank you for partnering with us over the past eight years, working towards our shared goal of a strong, high-quality, accessible and affordable system of public higher education in our Commonwealth. My colleagues and I are especially thankful to you, and the Baker-Polito Administration for your leadership and support during the pandemic. From March 2020 and continuing right up to even today, the COVID pandemic has certainly provided some of the most challenging times and decisions of our careers. We are grateful for your partnership with us and providing our campuses with the resources and support needed to keep our communities safe and healthy during that unprecedented time.

We are so pleased that this semester has proven to be a more traditional college experience for our students with some new flexibility, technology and tools that were greatly enhanced over the past few years. The higher education landscape is changing, and your state universities are adapting to meet the needs of our students now and in the future.

The Council of Presidents was delighted to welcome Commissioner Noe Ortega to our last business meeting, which was hosted at Salem State University. It was exciting for me to welcome the Commissioner and my colleagues to Salem and share some of our city's treasures, including the Peabody Essex Museum. We were equally proud to have our new Lt Gov and Viking Alumna Kim Driscoll join us for dinner. It was a great opportunity for our Council to connect with Dr. Ortega and hear more about his background and his priorities for public higher education in Massachusetts. I am pleased that he has continued to share his priorities this morning, and while you are drinking from a fire hose for sure, I would like to give you an "A." We look forward to a continued partnership in the years ahead.

Much has happened on our campuses since my last briefing to you in October. Our students have studied hard, persevering through midterms and are preparing for finals; they have performed in music and theater productions; they have competed in a variety of intercollegiate athletic

competitions; they have created art and innovation; they have completed internships, clinical placements and practicum experiences; they have been civically engaged in advocacy and service, voted, supported causes, and fought for initiatives they believe in; and, hopefully, they have had a little fun too.

EYP Report & Recommendations:

As a council, we thank this board for engaging with us through EY Parthenon's Strategic Review of Public Higher Education Financing. We appreciate the opportunity to provide input throughout this process and look forward to continuing this discussion through the transition of the new Administration.

This semester, our Council of Presidents had the pleasure to join with our students, faculty and staff in advocating for significant new investment in public higher education through the passage of Question 1, the Fair Share Amendment. The Council of Presidents is committed to working with you and our campus communities to make the most of this new investment in support of our students.

Our Council joins with this board to encourage state budget writers to follow the will of the voters and significantly increase investment in our public higher education system. I think that's one thing that echoes through all of the comments today. With the passage of Question 1 and the increased funding dedicated to public higher education, we can ensure residents of the commonwealth have access to high-quality and affordable postsecondary degree pathways.

The number one priority for your state universities is fully funding our employee collective bargaining agreements. Ensuring that unfunded obligations do not result in additional student charges is critical to keeping college affordable to our citizenry.

However, affordability of public higher education is only one part of the equation. Our campuses are mission driven to offer access to high-quality instruction and meaningful degree pathways to our students. Investing in our workforce and the instruction delivered by our faculty is critical to ensuring the quality of our academic programming. We respectfully request this board join us in support of our workforce and their critical role in advancing the goals and mission of our public higher education system.

To that end, the Universities Council of Presidents endorses the guiding principles outlined in the December 9, 2022, Chair's memo to the Board as informed by the EY Report. Those principles include:

- Fully funding our Collective Bargaining Agreements and employee fringe benefit costs, not through a methodology that funds only about 50% of the cost of the contract but actually provides campuses with the funding needed to cover the contractual obligations in the CBA;

- Significantly increasing financial aid by expanding the MassGrant program. We fully support the intention of the board to cover all student costs of attendance who have an EFC of zero;
- We support the Board's goal of creating additional financial pathways for low-income students by providing campuses with financial support for all Pell eligible students;
- We support working with the Department of Higher Education to develop a funding formula that weighs enrollment and low-income student enrollment but also takes into account operational costs of the campuses, including deferred maintenance, high impact programs, and workforce program alignment;
- We endorse the Board's recommendation to increase funding for the Department of Higher Education in order to support their ability to "catalyze innovation and collaboration" across the Public Higher Education system; and
- We support the Board's recommendation to create a tuition and fee system that is transparent and "makes sense" to the consumer – while also preserving and respecting the fiduciary duty of our local Boards.
- We continue to endorse the historical structure of local control over our campus through the oversight of gubernatorial trustee appointments. Our Boards of Trustees are rooted in our community, statutorily entrusted with the financial oversight of each institution and ensure we are following the mission of offering high-quality and affordable postsecondary degree pathways. This system of local governance and fiscal oversight has proven effective as evidenced by the fact that our academic programs continue to be some of the most affordable degree pathways in all of New England.
- The State Universities Council of Presidents thanks this board, and in particular Chair Gabrieli, for your tireless work on this report, and we look forward to continuing this collaboration over the coming months.

Closing

I would like to close again with another expression of gratitude to Secretary Peyser and this board for your service to the Massachusetts public education system. I'd also be remiss not to thank our segmental representative to the BHE and Salem State Trustee and former Chair Paul Mattera for his zealous advocacy for all our campuses and students.

Thank you for providing me with this opportunity to share an update from our state universities. I certainly wish you and your families a happy and healthy holiday season.

Thank you.