



State Universities  
of Massachusetts

## **CoP Remarks on Behalf of the State University System to the Board of Higher Education December 12, 2023**

---

### **Introduction:**

Good morning, Chairman Gabrieli, Secretary Tutwiler, Commissioner Ortega, and members of the Board of Higher Education. It is wonderful to be here in person. On behalf of the State Universities Council of Presidents, thank you for the opportunity to provide you with an update on the Massachusetts State University System.

It's great to be at Quinsigamond Community College today. The Community College System sets an incredible foundation for public higher education in the Commonwealth and are phenomenal partners to the State Universities. Through articulation agreements for academic programs and regional partnerships around student engagement and housing, there is so much we can partner on together.

As we wrap the first semester of this academic year, there is a lot to be grateful for as a Massachusetts public higher education institution. Our students have benefited from historic investment in the state budget, from the inclusion of undocumented students in in-state tuition and financial aid programs, and, most recently, from an extraordinary investment in financial aid overall to support our lowest income and medium income students.

I can assure you that the Council of Presidents remain eager to continue our work with this Board, the Department, our community college and UMass partners, and other stakeholders to help advance our shared interest in not only creating the best public higher education system for the Commonwealth, but also in ensuring access to residents and advancing the strategic plan for racial equity.

### **Fall Enrollment Numbers**

Overall, our campuses are seeing more stabilization in enrollment this fall. Application numbers are increasing, which yielded increases in first-time, full-time freshmen for many of our campuses. While most incoming students are Massachusetts residents, some campuses have seen

increases in out of state and international students as well. The most telling statistic we've seen this fall, however, is that the diversity of our student bodies is growing across the board on our campuses.

Massachusetts continues to be known for having welcoming public campuses, and our fall enrollment data demonstrates our state universities' commitment to providing affordable, accessible, and inclusive higher education experiences to all.

Even as enrollments in the Commonwealth's K-12 schools continue to decline, the state universities have been able to maintain strong and encouraging enrollment numbers, because Massachusetts residents recognize the great value proposition offered by our institutions. While some of our campuses have seen a drop in transfer students from Massachusetts' college partners, we are excited to work with our friends at the community colleges to make MassReconnect a success. Early signs indicate that this is a great investment.

As you know, community college student transfers represent the lion's share of transfers into the state universities. We are hopeful that students will take advantage of the MassReconnect program and enroll in a community college, at no cost, to finish their associates degree. At the same time, the state universities are redoubling our efforts to align our programs with the community colleges to ensure that any student interested in pursuing a bachelor's degree will have that opportunity seamlessly.

We know that the best way to keep our institutions attractive to Massachusetts residents, and competitive in the market, is by adequately funding our public higher education system. With the passage of the Fair Share ballot question and a commitment by the Administration and Legislature to prioritize public higher education in the State's budget, we are excited with the prospects of keeping our institutions affordable to all students in the Commonwealth. We applaud Governor Healey and legislative leaders for the historic investments made this year in the FY24 state budget.

### **Contract Negotiations and Funding**

We recently concluded contract negotiations with our three labor unions. As you may know, over 90 percent of state university employees are bargaining unit members. The financial parameters for unit member cost-of-living adjustments are set by the Administration, and our campuses are contractually obligated to fund those salary increases. The state universities have long sounded the alarm that historic underfunding of contract costs is the number one cost driver for our institutions. We appreciate that over the past few years this Board has joined us in our efforts to fully fund our campus collective bargaining agreements.

We were so pleased that the legislature passed, and the Governor quickly signed into law, the closeout budget, which included our three labor union contracts so our campuses can fulfill our

obligation and provide the salary increases to our workforce before the end of the year. We are extraordinarily grateful to the Governor, the Senate and the House for achieving this effort during informal session as it was both important to, and shows the value of, the employees of all levels on our campuses.

As the Administration finishes its work on their H2 budget recommendations, we ask this Board and the Department to continue advocacy efforts once again to ensure that public higher education remains a budget priority next year, so we have the resources we need to remain affordable and accessible to the students we serve.

### **FY24 Budget Priorities**

As I noted earlier, the FY23 budget and fair share spending have brought unprecedented investments to public higher education in the Commonwealth. We hope this pattern continues as it recognizes the extraordinary caliber and value of the programs we offer our students through all segments of Massachusetts public higher education. The CoP's top priorities for investment in the FY24 budget include:

- An equitable share of the Fair Share Revenue for the State University System;
- The release of a higher education bond bill, for both the completion of current projects and new projects, in addition to addressing deferred maintenance needs;
- Sustaining financial aid investment in order to reduce or eliminate debt for our students; and
- Investment in student success initiatives, such as those related to HSI and MSI programming to better serve the changing demographics of our students.

### **Conclusion**

Thank you for providing me with the opportunity to share this update from our state universities.

Over the past couple of years, I have had the chance to review campuses in two other New England states through NECHE accreditation work. The investments in higher education in these locations are no match for the Commonwealth. This context certainly makes me extremely grateful to be leading a university in Massachusetts.

The future of public higher education in our state is bright. We are excited to continue our work with you to provide better access and programming to our well deserving students.

I am happy to answer any questions you may have.