



Massachusetts Board of Higher Education Community College President's Report

Delivered by Laura Douglas, President, Bristol Community College

February 6, 2024

Good morning Chair Gabrieli, Secretary Tutwiler, Commissioner Ortega, and members of the Board.

Thank you for the chance this morning to bring you updates from our 15 community colleges. I am Laura Douglas, president of Bristol Community College with locations in Attleboro, Fall River, New Bedford, and Taunton. I'm standing in today for President Vander Hooven, chair of our Council of Presidents, who is unable to join us today.

Amazing things are happening at our community colleges, and I'm excited to talk about a few high points this morning.

First, THANK YOU to everyone who worked so hard behind the scenes to launch the Massachusetts Application for State Financial Aid – the MASFA – to give eligible undocumented students a FAFSA alternative. The passage of the tuition equity law was a critical development, and we are appreciative of the MASFA launch that streamlines access to need-based financial aid for these students.

Last December, President Vander Hooven reported to the BHE that MassReconnect had already made a dramatic impact on our campuses, and I am thrilled to tell you all that the MassReconnect data supports this. In the Fall of 2023, 8,400 new students over 25 enrolled at our community colleges. At my own college, we had the third highest boost from MassReconnect, with a 74.3% increase from Fall 22 to Fall 23 – an addition of 460 new degree seeking students at Bristol Community College. This spring, Bristol enrolled even more adult students, with a total of 768 MassReconnect students.

To that end, we are pleased to see that the Governor is recommending funding the program at \$24 million, an increase of \$4 million over last fiscal year. Also, of note in the Governor's budget is an increase of \$75 million in higher ed capital funding, from \$50 million to \$125 million, and a technical language change in the Tuition Equity law removing the requirement that students register for Selective Service.

We are very pleased to see increases in these areas, and we are advocating for an increase of funding to SUCCESS so that we can reach the \$18 million necessary to sustain the program which supports students who have the most systemic barriers to success in college.

Finally, and perhaps most notably, I want to update you all on the work done to-date in planning for Free Community College for all. At the last BHE meeting, we were just days from submitting

our initial draft to the legislature. Since that submission, we have provided a series of briefings on the report's findings, and have continued working with stakeholders to develop the framework of a final report which will be submitted to the legislature in April.

I would like to point out, as we have noted in our briefings, that the report recommends \$90 million to increase faculty and staff compensation so that we can become competitive with benchmark states and institutions. On behalf of our colleges, I can't emphasize enough how critical this piece of the puzzle is to ensuring that free community college is a viable option in the Commonwealth.

We look forward to presenting our findings and recommended framework to the FAAP committee soon.

We are grateful for the chance to share what's happening at our colleges, and I am happy to take any questions you might have.