

MASSACHUSETTS BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION

March 19, 2024

10:00 a.m.

via Zoom

Meeting Minutes

A meeting of the Board of Higher Education (BHE or Board) was held on Tuesday, March 19, 2024, remotely via teleconference (Zoom).

The following Board Members were present:

Chris Gabrieli, Chair

Danielle Allen

Mary Burns

Harneen Chernow

Ann Christensen¹

Veronica Conforme²

Alex Cortez

Cindy Mack, Voting Student Member, State University segment

Paul Mattera

Judy Pagliuca

Christina Royal

Patrick Tutwiler, Secretary of Education

Bill Walczak

Andrew Whitcomb, non-voting Student Advisor, UMass segment

Noe Ortega, Commissioner and Secretary to the Board

The following Board Members were absent:

Sarah Alzate-Pérez, non-voting Student Advisor, Community College segment

I. CALL TO ORDER

¹ Arrived at 10:33 a.m. after the roll call attendance.

² Arrived at 10:18 a.m. after the roll call attendance.

Board Chair Chris Gabrieli called the meeting to order at 10:01 a.m. Department of Higher Education (DHE or Department) Assistant Commissioner Elena Quiroz-Livanis took roll call attendance (see above for attendance roster).

II. COMMISSIONER'S SPOTLIGHT

List of Documents Used

[Commissioner's PowerPoint Presentation](#)

Commissioner Ortega stated that the Commissioner's Spotlight aims to highlight the work of the Department, focusing on equity, affordability, and high quality. The Department and Board have adopted a framework that aligns with these principles, aiming to advance high-quality, affordable education, invigorate innovation and collaboration, ensure data and outcomes, inform decision-making, and promote equity in outcomes.

Commissioner Ortega shared that the meeting's Spotlight focused on the work of two of the Department's offices, including the Office of Student Financial Aid (OSFA), led by Senior Deputy Commissioner of Access & Student Financial Assistance Clantha McCurdy, and the Office of Policy (OP), led by Deputy Commissioner of Policy Michael Dannenberg. Senior Deputy Commissioner McCurdy and Deputy Commissioner Dannenberg were joined by Robert Dais, Director of GEAR UP, and Nicole Giambusso, Director of Strategic Communication.

Senior Deputy Commissioner McCurdy stated that the DHE launched the Massachusetts Application for State Financial Aid (MASFA). The MASFA is a tool that helps implement the Commonwealth's recently passed Tuition Equity Law, which removed barriers namely for undocumented students by extending the in-state tuition rate and state financial aid to all students, largely irrespective of their immigration status, who can demonstrate that they attended high school in Massachusetts for at least three years and secured a diploma or the equivalent in the Commonwealth. Senior Deputy Commissioner McCurdy acknowledged the work of Chief Legal Counsel Papanikolaou and her team in leading the work related to developing implementation guidelines on the new Tuition Equity Law. The MASFA is a tool that helps implement the Tuition Equity Law as it is a state alternative form to the Federal Application for Student Aid (FAFSA), designed for students unable to complete the FAFSA due to their immigration status. The MASFA allows for access to state financial aid for public and private college students, including MASSGrant, MASSGrant Plus, and MassReconnect. The MASFA was launched in mid-January for the current 2023-24 academic year and 389 students have completed, or are in the process of completing, MASFA applications. Students completing the 2023-2024 MASFA can retroactively receive state financial aid.

Senior Deputy Commissioner McCurdy further explained that the 2024-2025 MASFA was also rolled out for new students applying for admission for the 2024-2025 academic year, and for enrolled students who are seeking financial aid for the 2024-2024 academic year; again, this form readily

duplicates what students are currently completing for FAFSA, and 230 students have already completed the 2024-2025 MASFA.

A communications and outreach plan focused on the MAFSA launch included workshops and training sessions for financial aid professionals, high school counselors, and other stakeholders.

Senior Deputy Commissioner McCurdy added that the Department is considering issuing early allocations for state financial aid, which would allow institutions to plan and better serve students by offering state resources such as Mass Grant Plus and Mass Reconnect in their award letters. Senior Deputy Commissioner McCurdy explained how this is the first time the Department has taken such a pathway, and it addresses something that institutions have requested for years.

Senior Deputy Commissioner McCurdy discussed how the Department was considering a FAFSA extension in order to address challenges faced by students and their families. She noted that although the priority deadline for FAFSA completion is May 1, 2024, the Department is considering extending the priority deadline for next year. Senior Deputy Commissioner McCurdy then turned to the Director Dais to continue the presentation.

Director Dais stated that the Department was allocated \$1million to improve FAFSA completion efforts and has partnered with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) to incentivize students from historically underserved populations and Gateway Cities. The goal is to ensure the neediest students are completing their FAFSA and MAFSA applications. Director Dias then turned the presentation over to Commissioner Ortega. Commissioner Ortega thanked the Office of Finance Aid for their work, and then turned to Director Giambusso and Deputy Commissioner Michael Dannenberg to begin their presentation.

Director Giambusso stated that the spring semester has been marked by delays and challenges with the FAFSA roll out, prompting the need for a responsive communications strategy. To assist in this area, regular meetings with partners like DESE, the Massachusetts Educational Financing Authority (MEFA), and the Massachusetts Alliance for Early College (MAEC) have been held to gather feedback from students and school counselors. One recent roundtable revealed a lack of awareness about MASSGrant Plus expansion, which is particularly important amid FAFSA-related delays and challenges. The Commonwealth of Massachusetts has nearly doubled financial aid awards for students, including MASSGrant Plus Expansion, which allows Pell Grant eligible students to receive free tuition, fees, and book allowance at public institutions. The Department and DESE have organized a virtual forum to present on MASSGrant Plus Expansion and MAFSA, and a one-page summary is being developed to streamline financial aid information sharing. The DHE is also working on building communications capacity this fall, targeting web and social ads to inform students about available financial aid programs.

Deputy Commissioner Dannenberg described the work of the Department's "Financial Aid Redesign Working Group" and reviewed the five principles guiding the work: 1) doing no harm to current

recipients; 2) being simple, transparent, and reliable; 3) prioritizing needy students and socio-economic mobility 4) increasing access and affordability; and 5) promoting degree completion. He described a timeline for the work, sharing that the group has already completed an initial taxonomy and secured consultants with the ultimate goal of sharing recommendations in Spring 2024.

At the conclusion of the Commissioner’s Spotlight, Chair Gabrieli invited questions from Board members. Board Member Pagliuca commented on ideas related to strategic communications and marketing. Board Member Walczak suggested that the entire Commonwealth should focus on promoting higher education, including promoting the idea that education is essential for the economy and progress of the state.

Board Member Chernow acknowledged the challenges posed by the current FAFSA delays with appreciation for the steps taken to resolve them. She observed that there is a perception that there is more merit-based financial aid available for those students coming from out-of-state to attend the Commonwealth’s State Universities in comparison to in-state students, and asked if a strategy exists to prioritize different categories of people and ensuring that the money is allocated appropriately. Deputy Commissioner Dannenberg responded that Massachusetts is a top state in need-based aid, with a high percentage coming from state and federal programs. However, it also has a significant percentage of aid from merit-based aid. In addition to need-based aid, Massachusetts offers institutional aid, attracting both out-of-state and in-state students. Deputy Commissioner Dannenberg stated that the ultimate unmet need of students should be considered, and opined that financial aid programs should prioritize needy families and socio-economic mobility. He also noted that it is important to consider whether attracting students from out-of-state actually benefits the state, though this question still needs to be addressed.

III. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

None.

IV. ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES

Chair Gabrieli asked for a motion to accept the minutes from the BHE meeting held on February 6, 2024. Hearing no further discussion, and on a motion duly made and seconded, the motion proceeded to a roll call vote and was approved as follows:

- Chair Chris Gabrieli – Yes
- Danielle Allen – Yes
- Mary Burns – Yes
- Harneen Chernow – Yes
- Ann Christensen – Yes
- Veronica Conforme – Yes
- Alex Cortez – Yes

- Cindy Mack – Not present during the vote
- Paul Mattera – Yes
- Judy Pagliuca – Yes
- Christina Royal – Yes
- Secretary Patrick Tutwiler – Yes
- Bill Walczak – Yes

V. REMARKS & REPORTS

A. Chair's Remarks

Chair Gabrieli thanked the Commissioner for his “spotlight” segments and indicated that he appreciated the robust discussion that followed. He shared his optimism about the work of the Department and the Board. He noted that the team is at an important moment and described his high level of confidence in their ability to follow through on their commitment to address future challenges and opportunities. He turned to Secretary Patrick Tutwiler for his remarks.

B. Secretary of Executive Office of Education’s (EOE) Remarks

Secretary Patrick Tutwiler yielded his time after commending Commissioner Ortega and the Commissioner’s team for their efforts put toward communicating issues surrounding the FAFSA roll-out, especially for economically disadvantaged and first-generation students, and expressed his hope for a swift resolution.

C. Reports from Presidents

State University Segmental Report

For a copy of President Keenan’s full remarks, please see:

[https://www.mass.edu/bhe/documents/BHE%20Segmental%20Report%20-%20March%20-%202024%20-%20FINAL%20\(1\).pdf](https://www.mass.edu/bhe/documents/BHE%20Segmental%20Report%20-%20March%20-%202024%20-%20FINAL%20(1).pdf)

President John Keenan of Salem State University provided updates on the Massachusetts State University segment on behalf of the State University Council of Presidents. He referenced the Joint Ways & Means Committee FY 2025 Budget Hearing, during which he requested that the legislature increase investments in public higher education to support personal and economic growth. President Keenan also addressed the Council of Presidents’ advocacy efforts in Washington, D.C., with regard to issues impacting student affordability, including doubling Pell grants and ensuring access to mental and behavioral health services.

President Keenan advocated for extending the SUCCESS program to the Commonwealth’s four-year public institutions in order to improve the outcomes and persistence rates of these students while also meeting the Commonwealth’s workforce needs.

He concluded by emphasizing the State Universities' efforts to offer professional practice doctorate degrees, and noted discussions with legislative leaders around the need to amend the Commonwealth's General Laws so that the Commonwealth's State Universities may offer them.

Board Member Allen asked President Keenan to clarify the legislative timetable revolving around professional practice doctorate degrees. President Keenan noted that under current law, the State Universities cannot offer such degrees unless the University of Massachusetts (UMass) assents; the process therefore includes meeting with UMass and gaining UMass board of trustees' approval as well as the BHE's approval. However, President Keenan acknowledged that this legislative effort to streamline the process by requiring only BHE approval is a long-standing one, and he expressed his hope that progress is made this year.

Board Member Pagliuca asked if the State Universities have a contingency plan to address students' demands in the event that the aforementioned FAFSA-related issues are not timely resolved. President Keenan confirmed that State Universities have also extended their deadlines, and all the financial aid offices will be ready to distribute offer letters to students at whatever time the FAFSA-related issues are resolved.

Community College Segmental Report

For a copy of President Vander Hooven's full remarks, please see:

https://www.mass.edu/bhe/documents/BHE_Community%20College%20Report_3.19.24.pdf

President Vander Hooven of Mount Wachusett Community College (MWCC) provided updates on the Massachusetts Community College segment of behalf of the Community College Council of Presidents. He highlighted MWCC's progress through the MassReconnect program, noting a 12.1% increase in overall headcount from Fall 2022 to Fall 2023, with a 30.6% increase in new student headcount and a 22.6% increase in students of color.

This Spring, overall headcount grew by 24.2% to 3,315 students, marking the first time since 2005 that Spring headcount exceeded the preceding Fall. The head count for New, first-time, degree-seeking first-year students nearly doubled, with students of color comprising 41% of the population. The program has also attracted more students of color, with 64.4% of new first-time degree-seeking students being 25+ years old. President Vander Hooven noted how the simplicity of the MassReconnect program has sent a powerful message to Massachusetts residents, and further added that the Free Community College advisory committee is working on finalizing a report for the legislature that outlines sustainable recommendations for making community college attainable for students across Massachusetts.

President Vander Hooven stated that the Community College Council of Presidents is in support of the Executive Office of Administration and Finance's (ANF) proposal to use \$125 million in Fair Share Amendment-related revenue to support capital investments on State University and Community

College campuses to address deferred maintenance. He noted that the funding would leverage additional borrowing capacity and provide modern, clean facilities for students. Lastly, the Community College Council of Presidents seeks to establish their college's Workforce Education and Training Fund (ETF) as a separate line item at \$12 million, allowing an additional 2,100 students per year to train for high-demand jobs in the Commonwealth.

Board Member Pagliuca commented that the legislature's distributions did not allocate funds for support for new students, which is crucial for ensuring a smooth transition. She inquired about the institutions' ability to support students through degree completion. President Vander Hooven responded that older students returning to college may have similar or even greater needs for support due to their academic distance from an educational environment. Although community college will be free, it still carries a high cost for these students, as they are not currently earning money. They also have children, need additional tutoring, and face insecurity related to transportation, housing, and food. The concept of free community college and MassReconnect requires ensuring that the Community College campuses can serve the students who come through the door and provide them with necessary support and resources.

D. Report from Student Advisory Council (SAC)

BHE Student Member Cindy Mack reported on SAC's recent activities, including visits from Deputy Commissioner Dannenberg, Assistant Commissioner Quiroz-Livannis, and Director of Civic Learning and Engagement John Reiff during their meeting on March 14, 2024. Students were made aware of resources available to them during Open Education Resources (OER) Week during March 4-8. SAC will hold student elections on April 25, 2024, and will select a voting student member to sit on the BHE. The election will include segment advisors from the Community Colleges and State Universities, along with the UMass system's own SAC Chair. Student Member Mack turned to UMass Segmental Advisor Andrew Whitcomb for his report.

UMass Segmental Advisor Andrew Whitcomb shared highlights of UMass President Marty Meehan's Annual State of UMass Address. He reported that UMass is investing heavily in its Early College Program, and the Commonwealth Collegiate Academy. These measures have resulted in nearly 1,000 early college credits. The Academy is on target to add more courses and students this year. UMass finished 2023 with record-breaking economic activity a 9-to-1 return on investment and a system supporting over 40,000 external jobs.

E. Commissioner's Report

Commissioner Ortega shared an update on his Joint Ways and Means Committee FY 2025 Budget Hearing testimony. He highlighted the results of capital investments made in programs such as SUCCESS, MassReconnect, and MASSGrant Expansion. He also addressed concerns about student funding and pledged to continue addressing persistence and completion rather than focusing only on

the creation of access points. Commissioner Ortega closed by emphasizing the importance of the Board's continued commitment to making college truly affordable for students.

VI. ADVISORY COUNCIL REPORTS

Chair Gabrieli turned to the next item and invited Board Member Alex Cortez to report on the work of the Evidence-Based Policymaking Advisory Council.

A. Evidence Based Policymaking

Member Alex Cortez reported that at the last Evidence-Based Policymaking (EBPM) Advisory Council meeting, the group met heard from various experts, including a representative from WestEd and Third Way, to discuss different ways of measuring economic mobility and return on investment (ROI). He stated the meeting underscored the Board's ability to bring diverse perspectives, to help educate, inspire, and inform the direction of our work. The recording will be available soon, and next steps may include a longer briefing with guest speakers.

Without further discussion, Chair Gabrieli continued to the next item on the agenda.

VII. EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE REPORT & MOTIONS

A. Executive Committee Report

No report.

B. Motions

List of Documents Used

BHE 24-40: [Revocation of the Degree Granting Authority of Park University](#)

BHE 24-41: [Approval of Criminal Justice Program Under the Guidelines for Criminal Justice and Law Enforcement Academic Programs](#)

Chair Gabrieli asked for a motion to approve *BHE 24-40, Revocation of the Degree Granting Authority of Park University*. He stated that the purpose of the motion stems from Park University's physical withdrawal from Massachusetts. The institution will instead provide online instruction to students through the State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement (SARA). Chair Gabrieli turned to the Board for questions.

Without further discussion, Chair Gabrieli turned to Assistant Commissioner Quiroz-Livanis for the vote. On a motion duly made and seconded, BHE 24-40 was approved by members present through a roll call vote, as follows:

- Chair Chris Gabrieli – Yes

- Danielle Allen – Yes
- Mary Burns – Yes
- Harneen Chernow – Yes
- Ann Christensen – Yes
- Veronica Conforme – Not present during the vote.
- Alex Cortez – Yes
- Cindy Mack – Yes
- Paul Mattera – Yes
- Judy Pagliuca – Yes
- Christina Royal – Yes
- Secretary Patrick Tutwiler – Yes
- Bill Walczak – Yes

BHE 24-40 A REVOCATION OF THE DEGREE GRANTING AUTHORITY OF PARK UNIVERSITY

VOTED: The Board of Higher Education hereby revokes the legal authority of Park University to operate and grant degrees in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts retroactive to December 31, 2023.

Authority Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 69, Section 30 et seq

Contact Cynthia Farr Brown, Ph.D., Associate Commissioner of Regulatory and Veterans Affairs

Chair Gabrieli turned to the next agenda item, a motion to approve **BHE 24-41**, *Approval of Criminal Justice Programs Under the Guidelines for Criminal Justice and Law Enforcement Academic Programs*. He summarized the motion and noted that BHE 24-41 was reviewed and recommended by Board staff after determining that Fisher College met the program's guidelines. Chair Gabrieli turned to the Board for questions.

Without further discussion, Chair Gabrieli turned to Assistant Commissioner Quiroz-Livanis for the vote. On a motion duly made and seconded, BHE 24-41 was approved by members present through a roll call vote, as follows:

- Chair Chris Gabrieli – Yes
- Danielle Allen – Yes
- Mary Burns – Yes
- Harneen Chernow – Yes
- Ann Christensen – Yes
- Veronica Conforme – Not present during the vote.
- Alex Cortez – Yes
- Cindy Mack – Yes

- Paul Mattera – Yes
- Judy Pagliuca – Yes
- Christina Royal – Yes
- Secretary Patrick Tutwiler – Yes
- Bill Walczak – Yes

BHE 24-41 APPROVAL OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE PROGRAMS UNDER THE GUIDELINES FOR CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND LAW ENFORCEMENT ACADEMIC PROGRAMS

VOTED That the Board of Higher Education approve the application by Fisher College for the Degrees of Associate of Science in Criminal Justice; Bachelor of Science in Criminal Justice; and Master of Science in Criminal Justice under the Guidelines for Criminal Justice and Law Enforcement Academic Programs. All three programs have been found to meet or exceed all quality standards established by the Guidelines making them eligible for police career incentive pay increases under the Police Career Incentive Pay Program (PCIPP) formally known as the Quinn Bill.

Authority Chapter 41, Section 108L (as amended).

Contact Richard Riccardi, Sc.D., Deputy Commissioner for Academic Affairs & Student Success

VIII. BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION

List of Documents Used

BHE 24-42 [Approval of Guidelines for the Massachusetts In-Demand Scholarship Program.](#)

A. [Attachment A](#)

Chair Gabrieli turned to the final agenda item, a motion to approve *BHE 24-42, Approval of Guidelines for the Massachusetts In-Demand Scholarship Program*. He stated the motion puts forth guidelines for an in-demand scholarship program approved by the legislature last year, which was developed and funded for specific in-demand fields. Chair Gabrieli turned to the Board for questions.

Board Member Judy Pagliuca asked if there is a way to determine the effectiveness of programs. Commissioner Ortega confirmed that assessing program effectiveness is underway and mentioned the implications of timing and implementation. Chair Gabrieli offered a comment expressing the challenge of achieving multi-year predictability in higher education budgeting, making the argument that the current annual budget process is limiting. He emphasized the need for a shift in mindset towards a process that would create the conditions for multi-year budgeting.

Hearing no further discussion, Chair Gabrieli turned to Assistant Commissioner Quiroz-Livanis for the vote. On a motion duly made and seconded, BHE 24-42 was approved by members present through a roll call vote, as follows:

- Chair Chris Gabrieli – Yes
- Danielle Allen – Yes
- Mary Burns – Yes
- Harneen Chernow – Yes
- Ann Christensen – Yes
- Veronica Conforme – Yes
- Alex Cortez – Yes
- Cindy Mack – Yes
- Paul Mattera – Yes
- Judy Pagliuca – Yes
- Christina Royal – Yes
- Secretary Patrick Tutwiler – Yes
- Bill Walczak – Yes

BHE 24-42 APPROVAL OF GUIDELINES FOR THE MASSACHUSETTS IN-DEMAND SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

VOTED: The Board of Higher Education hereby adopts the attached Financial Aid Guidelines for the Massachusetts In-Demand Scholarship program as enacted in the FY2024 Budget

Authority M.G.L. c. 15A, Sec. 9 and 16; FY2024 Budget Language – Line Item 1596-2423

Contact: Clantha McCurdy, Senior Deputy Commissioner for Access and Student Financial Assistance

IX. OTHER BUSINESS

None.

X. ADJOURNMENT

Chair Gabrieli adjourned the meeting at 12:00 p.m.

*Respectfully Submitted,
Noe Ortega, Ph.D.
Commissioner and Secretary to the Board*