



State Universities  
of Massachusetts

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

February 14, 2023

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### **Introduction:**

I too appreciate the reference to Patrick Mahomes as a first-generation student. Seeing the grit he showed in the last two games, it didn't surprise me. Our Vikings are equally gritty and determined.

Good Morning, Chairman Gabrieli, Secretary Tutwiler, 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.

Welcome, Mr. Secretary, to your first meeting. The Council of Presidents is excited about your appointment and looks forward to your leadership – and the collaboration with Commissioner Ortega – as we exit covid and into the promising new era of higher education with the infusion of the Fair Share funds. Notwithstanding the many headwinds in education today, I'm fully confident that working together we will meet this moment and deliver for the Commonwealth's students – many from the Gateway Communities like the city of Lynn that you know so well. Equity, indeed, Mr. Secretary.

There is much work ahead to provide all students in the Commonwealth access to higher education. Regional demographics are changing, and we must respond to the educational needs of these new community members. The State University System is working hard to make this pathway accessible and to prepare for the students of our future.

In the next couple of years Salem State will likely become Massachusetts' very first four-year public institution with a Hispanic-Serving - Minority-Serving designation, with more than 25% of our student population identifying as Hispanic. Serving 11 of the 26 Gateway Communities in the Commonwealth and with our top feeder communities being Lynn, Peabody and Salem, we know the opportunities higher education brings to increased social mobility, civic life, culture and the economy. Thank you for your leadership, and we look forward to working with you.

I would now like to speak about the budget proposal you are discussing today.

## **FY24 Budget Proposal:**

The State Universities join the Board of Higher Education, our partners at UMass and the Community Colleges, as well as the growing list of constituency groups calling for investment in the Massachusetts Public Higher Education System. With passage of the “Fair Share” constitutional amendment – based on the low-end of the Consensus Revenue Hearing estimates – it is anticipated that around \$1.3 billion in additional tax revenues annually will ultimately be generated. This additional funding would provide resources for investment in our public higher education institutions to ensure we are able to continue to provide access to high-quality and affordable public colleges and universities.

The case for reinvestment starts today with the adoption of your FY24 budget recommendations. The state universities fully support and endorse the proposed budget recommendations that you will be voting on later in this meeting. These budget recommendations call for the following:

- Investing in our students through direct financial aid
- Investing in our institutional operating costs by establishing a base appropriation that recognizes costs associated with our labor contracts and funding formula allocations from FY23 appropriations;
- A 3% allocation to the State Universities performance-based Funding Formula line item;
- Investment in student success by creating a separate appropriation to fund student supports for socio-economically disadvantaged students based on a \$2,000 per Pell-eligible student appropriation;
- and, last but certainly not least, Increased funding for the SUCCESS program and expansion of early college initiatives.

Our state universities enthusiastically support these areas of investment and ask this board to approve these FY24 budget recommendations.

Related to the budget recommendations you’ll be reviewing, I would be remiss if I did not bring up a critical issue for all public institutions of higher education, and that is the financing of capital projects on our campuses. Through policy changes made during a period of much more difficult budgets, a “cost-sharing” model of financing public higher education capital construction capped state investment for new campus construction at \$30M. The state must consider restructuring this inequitable system of capital spending as it essentially requires our students to pay for state building projects. As a result, the current state universities projects - at different stages of construction across our system – are significantly underfunded. With cost escalation due to inflation, and the state picking up only a portion of the total cost of these projects, our students will be expected to pick up the tens of millions of dollars in costs that were historically fully funded by the state. This policy does not align with the Strategic Plan for Racial Equity as it shifts the cost of state construction projects onto our students. We believe this policy should be revisited and ask the board to join us in this effort.

Lastly, I would like to speak about higher education advocacy at both the federal and state levels.

## **Beacon Hill and Capitol Hill:**

Several of my colleagues look forward to joining students, faculty, and staff from all 3 segments for Higher Education for All Advocacy Day at the State House on February 28 in order to

advocate for reinvestment in public higher education. It is so important for our students to share their stories with elected officials about why they chose to “Go Public”, the need for financial investments in our students as well as our campuses, and the importance of providing an affordable and high-quality future for public higher education.

Pivoting from Beacon Hill to Capitol Hill, two weeks ago, representatives from the state university campuses traveled to Washington D.C. to meet with members of the Massachusetts Congressional Delegation and their staff. Our colleagues advocated for several issues that impact student affordability, including increasing Pell grants. They also shared our concerns about the large number of our students suffering from food and housing insecurity and the need to ensure our students have access to mental and behavioral health services. They also shared that our campuses are awaiting the final Title IX regulatory changes by the U.S. Dept. of Education and the impact these changes will have on our campus communities. The members of our Congressional Delegation and their staff warmly welcomed our colleagues and encouraged us to continue our advocacy efforts as the federal government prepares to begin their budget process as well.

The state universities are committed to continue our advocacy efforts at the state and federal level, exhausting all opportunities for all who wish to pursue high-quality and affordable postsecondary education at one of our Massachusetts public higher education institutions.

**Conclusion:**

Let’s Meet this Moment, Mr. Secretary and Mr. Commissioner. Our students deserve no less!

I’d be happy to answer any questions you have.

Thank you.

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