



Massachusetts Board of Higher Education Community College President's Report

Bill Heineman, President, North Shore Community College

Chair, Community College Council of Presidents

June 17, 2025

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

I am honored to address the board in my first remarks as Chair of the Community College Council of Presidents for this academic year and look forward to working together in the interests of improving public higher education for all students in the Commonwealth. My name is Bill Heineman and I've had the pleasure of serving as president of North Shore Community College since 2021.

Prior to this role, I served in various roles in the Massachusetts community college system for over 20 years, and it is an honor to lead one of our community colleges during a time of such great transition. Free Community College, which includes MassReconnect and MassEduate, continues to be successful across the state. Spring to spring, our community colleges saw an average enrollment increase of 18% over the previous spring - at North Shore Community College, we've seen an increase of 19% from spring 24 to 25. And as an anecdote, our enrollment for this fall at North Shore is currently up 40% over this point last year. It is thrilling to see the impact Free Community College is having on our student body.

Of course, while we continue to celebrate Free Community College, expanded financial aid, and a deep commitment to our diverse student body, we also continue to advocate against policies at the Federal level that threaten to undermine our recent gains. Most notably, we have serious concerns about the reconciliation bill that passed the House of Representatives a few weeks ago that makes drastic cuts to Pell Grants and other financial aid programs. Additional cuts within the bill – including proposed reductions to SNAP and Medicaid benefits – threaten not only to impact our students directly, but would absolutely have an impact on the broader landscape.

So while we are keeping a close eye on Congressional budget actions in general, we are hyper focused on seeing the House's proposed Pell changes fail. Tens of thousands of our students rely on Pell Grants and the changes approved in the House – which entirely eliminate Pell Grants for students taking less than eight credits and increase the credit requirement to receive a full Pell award from 12 credits to 15 – would threaten the future of Free Community College and have a disastrous impact on our students. We were relieved to see that the Senate's

version does not include the same Pell changes but remain concerned about what could happen when the bill returns to the House.

A silver lining in the reconciliation bill is the inclusion of so-called “Workforce Pell” in both chambers’ versions. This will have a positive impact on the work we do at community colleges by lowering the threshold on the length a program needs to be to qualify for federal financial aid. Much of what happens at a community college happens in our “non-credit” workforce training areas. The changes to the Pell grant will finally open the doors for those students to also receive aid. This would include programs such as CNA, medical assisting, phlebotomy, EMT, IT Helpdesk, and behavioral health technician. To date, no financial aid has been available to support these vital training programs. That’s about to end and we couldn’t be happier.

There is one cautionary note for this board to consider: The changes to workforce Pell will allow unaccredited institutions and organizations to offer these short-term training programs for Pell eligibility. This could lead to a consumer protection crisis as there could be bad-actor, for-profit organizations attempting to take advantage of this loophole in the new policy. The good news is that the bill gives state lawmakers and boards of higher education the authority to veto a program’s participation in Pell in their state, and to determine which programs should qualify. The Massachusetts BHE has a long history of ensuring that institutions offering credentials here are actually doing what they say they are. This will be a new area that will need such focus to ensure our students in the Commonwealth are not being taken advantage of.

On the state level, we look forward to seeing the final FY26 budget and hope to see it released from conference committee soon. We continue to advocate for the inclusion of increased SUCCESS funding, and also hope to see language retained in the final budget that calls for a classification study for our community college faculty and staff.

I will stop short of sharing our itemized budget priorities, but will note the importance of quickly allocating funding out to our institutions. This year, critical funding was delayed in reaching our colleges, including Hunger Free Campus and College Student Mental Health Supports, until just last month. It is our hope that state appropriations for the coming fiscal year can be disseminated more urgently so that our staff have time to put them to use most effectively for our students.

Finally, the community college presidents look forward to the continued constructive dialogue with the Department and Board around the creation of a new process for innovative programs. We are supportive of finding a way forward that promotes creative thinking while also balancing the needs of students and institutions in considering any such changes. To be done thoughtfully, we believe that inclusion of a wide range of perspectives, including faculty, staff, and administrators, ought to be part of the process, and appreciate the opportunity to be as inclusive as possible.

Thank you – I am happy to take any questions you might have.