



State Universities
of Massachusetts

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

Westfield State University
October 31, 2017

Introduction:

Good morning Secretary Peyser, Chairman Gabrieli, Commissioner Santiago and members of the Board of Higher Education. Thank you for the opportunity to provide you with my first state university system update as Chair of the Council of Presidents this year. I would first like to begin by thanking President Javier Cevallos, for the work he did last year as COP Chair to strengthen the working relationship between the DHE, BHE and our State Universities. I look forward to continuing and building upon that effort.

I am also pleased to welcome and recognize Danielle Dupuis, a Bridgewater State University Senior Psychology major, as the new voting student member of the Board of Higher Education. I know Danielle will represent the students of Bridgewater State, the state universities and all of public higher education well this year as a member of the board.

Since the Board last met, the Council of Presidents has welcomed another new president to our ranks. This summer, John Keenan officially assumed the presidency of Salem State University. Congratulations President Keenan. In addition, less than two weeks ago, David Nelson was formally inaugurated as president of the Massachusetts College of Art and Design. The inauguration featured events that celebrated the long history of the only free standing, publicly funded, public art and design college in the United States. I would like to thank the Commissioner and Secretary for being part of the ceremony. I would like to enter into the record President Nelson's inaugural address which highlighted the historic role MassArt has played in public education, and stressed the important linkages between arts education and the quality of life of our citizenry.

Early Enrollment Presentation:

Later today, the board will hear a presentation on the Fall FY18 early enrollment numbers for the campuses. Over the last decade, the state universities have witnessed a significant increases in undergraduate enrollment, with more and more Massachusetts high school graduates choosing to attend one of our state universities or other public higher education intuition in the commonwealth. Today, 70% of Massachusetts high school graduates who go to college within the state attend public higher education. Even as enrollments in the Commonwealth's K-12 schools continue to decline, the

state universities have been able to maintain strong enrollment numbers because Massachusetts residents recognize the great value proposition offered at our institutions.

To ensure we maintain strong enrollment numbers on our campuses, the state universities have worked to strengthen and bolster transfer agreements and programs with our community college partners; we are full partners with the Department of Higher Education's Mass Transfer work; and we have embraced the Commonwealth Commitment and working hand-in-glove with our Community College partners to offer new and more affordable pathways to four-year degrees programs. Additionally, our state university COP, along with our admissions directors facilitate regional working groups, open to high school guidance counselors and transfer coordinators throughout Massachusetts. We organize these meetings several times throughout the year with Massachusetts public and private high schools and our state universities in an effort to promote our institutions and to provide updates to guidance counselors on our admissions process.

Although our enrollment numbers remain strong, we are concerned with some new regional influences and initiatives intended to draw students away from our Commonwealth's public colleges and universities. Many of our neighboring states have adopted new policies that target Massachusetts high school students by offering tuition discounts and other financial incentives to students willing to attend an out of state institution. We should fight back. We believe that Massachusetts Public Higher Education institutions are becoming increasingly vulnerable to these marketing efforts, in large part, because of the lack of state funding for obligations outside the control of the college campus; in particular, funding for collective bargaining agreements, fringe benefit costs, and importantly - deferred maintenance.

Currently, we are in negotiations for a successor agreement with all three campus bargaining units of the state universities, MSCA, APA, and AFSCME. However, the unfunded liability of the prior CBA is nearly \$33m; and that does not include an additional \$10m in unfunded fringe benefit costs for all non-state supported employees. These costs continue to pressure the affordability of our universities and colleges. As you know, regardless of state appropriation or additional state funding for the cost of these contracts, our campuses are required to pay the incremental salary increases agreed upon in the CBAs. Without state funding to cover these obligations, we are forced to use a combination of operating budget cuts, one time revenues, campus reserves, foundation funds, and student fees to meet our obligations. No matter how much our campuses maximize efficiencies, reduce costs and enter into collaborative agreements, we could never make up this \$33 million shortfall realistically without impacting student fees. Opening affordable pathways for college degrees must be an urgent call to action in our state. The price for failing to do so will surely be a smaller and less talented workforce. Our economy cannot compete effectively if that happens in the short years ahead. Our campuses are often criticized for raising our student fees but the unfunded portion of our collective bargaining contracts, accounts for a significant portion of those student fee increases. The best way to keep our quality institutions attractive to Massachusetts residents and competitive in an increasingly competitive market, is by simply having the Commonwealth fully fund its obligations for each year of the collective bargaining agreements.

The council of presidents is committed to work with the department and the Board of Higher Education to develop models to retain students in Massachusetts and meet our workforce needs. Studies show that there is a direct link to a state's support for public higher education and the strength of its economy. A study published earlier this year in the New York Times shows that public colleges offer the best, and in most cases, the only chance for people living in impoverished communities a chance at upward economic mobility. Another study commissioned by the Mass Budget and Policy Center,

illustrates the historic defunding of public higher education and the direct correlation between education, wages, and the strength of the state economy. These two reports clearly show the link between the education level of a state's workforce and the economic health of the state. I will provide these studies for your review at the conclusion of my remarks.

State University & Community College Advocacy:

In an effort to call attention to the strong correlation between public higher education and economic health of the Commonwealth, I am pleased to announce that the State University Council of Presidents and the community college council of presidents are working to build upon our already strong relationship between the two segments. This summer, working with President Kennedy as chair of the community college council, the executive committees of presidents from both segments met jointly to explore ways to partner more closely. As you are well aware, the state universities and community colleges collaborate together on numerous initiatives – cost saving measures and efficiencies; on-line education; the Commonwealth Commitment; DHE initiatives; and legislative advocacy. We are now partnering on a collaborative effort to share our successes to larger audiences across the Commonwealth. This message is important for policy makers, business leaders, and the general public to understand. Both Councils of Presidents look forward to working with the department and this board to promote our public college and universities throughout the academic year.

COP Initiatives:

Over the next year, I plan to provide this board with updates on COP initiatives and items of interest to the council of presidents. At future meetings I will update you on our state university and community college advocacy campaign, data and information to show the need for a comprehensive capital bond bill to address the deferred maintenance needs on our campuses, our work to bolster and grow the Mass Colleges On-Line web portal, legislative priorities for our campuses and reports on the fiscal strength and challenges of our state university institutions. I look forward to working closely with Commissioner Santiago, his team at the DHE, and the Board of Higher Education to ensure that our state universities are well positioned to provide the best value proposition to Massachusetts residents and offer the highest quality pathways for a four year degree in the nation.

Campus Hate Crimes:

Lastly, on behalf of my colleagues, our faculty and staff and most importantly our students, I want to share with you an update on disturbing incidents of hate and bigotry that have taken place on some of our college and university campuses over the past few weeks. These incidents are on the rise and sadly reflect growing national tensions and divisive rhetoric.

As you likely know, several of our state universities have been the target of recent actions of hate speech, directed at minority students, in our dorms and on our campus grounds. This is unacceptable, reprehensible, shameful, disturbing, and frankly, criminal. Racism has no place in our society and will not be tolerated on our campuses. The impacted campuses have worked with local, state, and federal law enforcement authorities and have launched investigations into these hate crimes. The Presidents, our students, campus and community leaders, have opened a dialog around campus climate, intolerance and bigotry. Each campus has held forums to hear from campus community members, not

simply to listen, but to take actionable steps to ensure that our campuses provide a safe and welcoming environment to all our students and our employees. We will keep the Commissioner apprised of campus investigations into these incidents and will provide him with information as it becomes available.

I believe that President Torrecilha of Westfield State said it best in his recent op-ed in Commonwealth Magazine, "Hate messages undermine the mission of higher education as well as its legacy of creating opportunity for individuals who may not be part of the mainstream."

Be assured – we will forcefully address racism and incivility on our campuses. As President Obama noted on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution abolishing slavery, "We betray the efforts of the past if we fail to push back against bigotry in all its forms ... To rise above the cynicism and rise above the fear, to hold fast to our values, to see ourselves in each other, to cherish dignity and opportunity not just for our own children but for somebody else's child.

Closing:

In closing, I would like to share with you some news, which illustrates the core values we hold as public institutions. In an effort to aid in the relief to people impacted by hurricanes in Texas, Puerto Rico and Virgin Islands, the Massachusetts Maritime Academy dispatched the Training Ship Kennedy, initially to Texas, and then to Puerto Rico. The crew of the TS Kennedy is working with Federal and State Emergency Management Agencies to provide aid and assistance to those communities. The ship is scheduled to be back in Buzzards Bay, later this fall, in time to for the MMA's cadet sea term education.

We are also aware that this board is considering a Natural Disaster Tuition Waiver for college-age students impacted by the hurricanes. As you develop this policy, I would like to share with you that some of your state university campuses have already been working with families from those affected areas in an effort to provide them access to educational opportunities on our campuses. We are happy to work with you as you develop this tuition waiver policy.

Thank you, and as always, we encourage you to visit any or all of our campuses. We welcome the opportunity to show you the great work that we do at your state universities.