

**Massachusetts Board of Higher Education
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

January 29, 2024
2:30 p.m.- 4:00 p.m.

The January 29, 2024, meeting of the Executive Committee of the Board of Higher Education (“BHE” or “the Board”) was held virtually on the web-conference platform Zoom.

Meeting Minutes

- Committee Members Present: BHE Chair Chris Gabrieli; Veronica Conforme; Alex Cortez; Bill Walczak; and Commissioner Noe Ortega (non-voting, ex officio).
- Others BHE Members Present: Secretary of EOE designee Robert Lepage; Paul Mattera; Mary Burns; and Andrew Whitcomb (non-voting UMass Student Segmental Advisor).
- Department Staff Present: Constantia Papanikolaou; Elena Quiroz-Livanis; Jose Luis Santos; Richard Riccardi; and Matthew Cole.

I. CALL TO ORDER

Board Chair Chris Gabrieli called the meeting to order at 2:35 p.m. Roll call attendance was taken (see above for attendance roster).

II. MOTIONS

List of Material's Used

BHE Motions 24-24 through 24-38

Chair Gabrieli began the meeting by proposing a motion to bundle and approve minutes. Upon a motion duly made and seconded, the motion to approve the Executive Committee minutes for June 12, 2023 and December 4, 2023 was approved unanimously by all members present, by roll call vote. Chair Gabrieli reviewed the agenda items, noting the following items: five (5) letters of intent, seven (7) tuition rate motions for FY25, and one (1) MSCBA FY25 rent schedule and operating budget motion.

Chair Gabrieli introduced *BHE 24-24 Approval of Letter of Intent of Fitchburg State University to Award the Bachelor of Arts in Creative Art Enterprise and Authorization for Fast Track Review*. Chair Gabrieli asked for clarification regarding majors that overlap in liberal arts. Fitchburg State University's (FSU) Provost, Patricia Marshall, responded that this is a way for FSU to pull out concentrations from degree programs they already offer. Chair Gabrieli asked about the alignment elements. Provost Marshall responded that this aligns with education justice and the notion of having a student-ready campus by preparing students to enter the workforce.

Committee Member Conforme asked how FSU reflects on how the curriculum is serving its Latinx community. FSU Assistant Professor Jonathan Harvey responded that FSU infuses by choice of repertoire, such as music in different languages and collaborative performance with different schools. FSU Assistant Professor Amy McGlothlin added that the entire faculty is conscientious about how the program represents students.

In terms of pathways and internships, Provost Marshall added that the program would provide students with skills to create their own businesses. FSU's Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs, Franca Barricelli, noted that the intentionality of the degree is to build on the connections already established by the institution. Hearing no further discussion, Chair Gabrieli called for a motion to approve BHE 24-24. Upon a motion duly made and seconded, the BHE Motion 24-24 was approved unanimously by all members present, by roll call vote.

Chair Gabrieli moved on to introduce *BHE 24-25 Approval of Letter of Intent of Fitchburg State University to Award the Bachelor of Arts in Expressive Arts Therapies with Concentrations in Music, Visual Arts, and Drama and Authorization for Fast Track Review*. Hearing no discussion, Chair Gabrieli called for a motion to approve BHE 24-25. Upon a motion duly made and seconded, BHE Motion 24-25 was approved unanimously by all members present, by roll call vote.

Chair Gabrieli next introduced *BHE 24-26 Approval of Letter of Intent of Greenfield Community College to Award the Associate in Science in Allied Health and Authorization for Fast Track Review*. Chair Gabrieli asked for further context on the program. Greenfield Community College's Vice President of Academic Affairs, April Parson, provided that the program would allow students to earn a degree and choose a different pathway instead of a nursing (or RN) pathway. Hearing no further discussion, Chair Gabrieli called for a motion to approve BHE 24-26. Upon a motion duly made and seconded, BHE Motion 24-26 was approved unanimously by all members present, by roll call vote.

Thereafter, Chair Gabrieli introduced *BHE 24-27 Approval of Letter of Intent of Northern Essex Community College to Award the Associate in Science in Entrepreneurial Business and Authorization for Fast Track Review*. Committee Member Walczak requested a summary of the program. Northern Essex Community College's (NECC) Professor, Sheila Muller, provided a summary stating the school has been the genesis of many businesses. The program has embedded what entrepreneurs need to build business plans and marketing. Committee Member Conforme inquired about the necessary, specific skills that the program would provide. Professor Muller responded that students would learn the proper formation of a business.

At this time, Board Member Paul Mattera joined the Executive Committee meeting.

Hearing no further discussion, Chair Gabrieli called for a motion to approve BHE 24-27. Upon a motion duly made and seconded, BHE Motion 24-27 was approved unanimously by all members present, by roll call vote.

Chair Gabrieli introduced *BHE 24-28 Approval of Letter of Intent of Northern Essex Community College to Award the Associate in Science in Marketing and Authorization for Fast Track Review*. Hearing no discussion, Chair Gabrieli called for a motion to approve BHE 24-28. Upon a motion duly made and seconded, BHE Motion 24-28 was approved unanimously by all members present, by roll call vote.

Next, Chair Gabrieli proposed placing all five of these program approval motions on a Consent Agenda, for bundled approval at next week's Board meeting. Chair Gabrieli called for a motion for *Approval of Board of Higher Education Motions 24-24 to 24-28 on a Consent Agenda*. Upon a motion duly made and seconded, the floor motion (which will be numbered BHE Motion 24-29) was approved unanimously by all members present, by roll call vote.

Soon after, Chair Gabrieli proposed bundling for approval, approving, and placing the following motions on a Consent Agenda, for expedited consideration at next week's Board meeting:

- BHE 24-30 Community Colleges Resident Tuition Rates for FY2025
- BHE 24-31 Community Colleges Non-Resident Tuition Rates for FY2025
- BHE 24-32 State Universities Resident Undergraduate Tuition Rates for FY2025

- BHE 24-33 State Universities Non-Resident Undergraduate Tuition Rates for FY2025
- BHE 24-34 State Universities Resident Graduate Tuition Rates for FY2025
- BHE 24-35 State Universities Non-Resident Graduate Tuition Rates for FY2025
- BHE 24-36 Alternative Non-Resident Undergraduate Tuition Rates – Berkshire Community College and Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts for FY2025

Chair Gabrieli called for a motion for *Approval of Board of Higher Education Motions 24-30 to 24-36 on a Consent Agenda*. Upon a motion duly made and seconded, the floor motion (which will be numbered BHE Motion 24-37) was approved unanimously by all Committee Members present, by roll call vote. During this vote, Committee Members were given an opportunity to discuss the presented motions. Chair Gabrieli expressed his concern that stagnant tuition rates are coinciding with increasing fees and effective costs. Chair Gabrieli expressed his opinion that this is not the best way to execute the tuition rate process.

Chair Gabrieli introduced the final motion *BHE 24-38 Approval of Massachusetts State College Building Authority (MSCBA) Fiscal Year 2025 Rent Schedule and Operating Budget*. Committee Member Walczak noted that he serves on the MSCBA board as a BHE representative, and he commented that there was a discussion made on the MSCBA Board about the occupancy rates and various dormitories, and how they are being utilized effectively. Chair Gabrieli asked if the dormitories generated net cash even at a lower occupancy. Committee Member Walczak responded that it varies by campus.

Jennifer Gonzalez added that each campus resident hall runs separately from finances, and any revenue that comes in from rent is deposited into a trust and expenses for the residence halls are paid out of that trust. She added that the agreement that was signed with the Board requires institutions to maintain 5% reserve in the trust each year, and some universities used federal funds to support the residence hall trust funds during Covid-19. She concluded by mentioning that universities are looking at their future expected enrollment, and it may impact the way they utilize the buildings in conjunction with discussions with the Commonwealth about how else the buildings could be utilized. Janet Chrisos added that it has been a burden for some institutions to have this excessive capacity, and there has been quite a contribution from the operating funds of the universities to maintain the budget. Chair Gabrieli asked if the sponsorship for the universities can be found in the financials for the meeting. Janet Chrisos responded that it is provided in the financials as a line item.

Committee Member Conforme asked if there is someone already implementing alternative strategies on use of the buildings to mitigate under-enrollment. Janet Chrisos responded that there have been studies conducted on staff housing, and there are other entities that are interested in staff housing. She added campuses are also considering using buildings for daycare. Board Member Mattera commented that there is an entire dormitory that is being used to house migrants, as part of a partnership between the university and city to help mitigate the housing crisis. Hearing no further discussion, Chair Gabrieli called for a motion to approve BHE 24-38. Upon a motion duly made and seconded, BHE Motion 24-38 was approved unanimously by all members present, by roll call vote.

III. DISCUSSION

- **Advisory Council Updates**

Chair Gabrieli moved on to Advisory Council updates and asked the BHE Chair of the Evidence-Based Policy Making (EBPM) Advisory Council (AC) Meeting, Alex Cortez, for an update on the EBPM December 14, 2023, meeting. Chair Cortez informed the Committee Members that one initiative was to assess what various options there were to calculate and quantify economic mobility and return of investment. He added that the economic mobility component is relevantly easy, but the return of investment would require a more in-depth conversation. He spoke about bringing in national speakers at the next meeting to provide judicial context for them as they begin to think about different options on return of investment.

Chair Gabrieli next asked the BHE Co-Chair of the Finance and Administrative Policy (FAAP) Advisory Council (AC), Veronica Conforme, for an update on the January 5, 2024, meeting. Co-Chair Conforme informed the Committee Members that she was not present for the entire meeting, and asked Chair Gabrieli to provide the update. Chair Gabrieli informed Committee Members they had an opportunity to hear from the members of the Massachusetts Teacher Association, who have been lead sponsors of a set of proposals known as the *Cherish Act*. They also heard from three national experts on college affordability and higher education financial aid, and four leaders of local college access programs. He concluded by advising that the FAAP AC will be scheduled to hear in detail from the Massachusetts Association of Community Colleges about a proposal they have been developing on free community college with a consultant.

Commissioner Ortega added that the FAAP meeting laid a great foundation for guiding principles in Massachusetts in terms of affordability, and shedding light on multiple frameworks that define the idea of free college from a segmental perspective.

Commissioner Ortega noted that Board Members and others provided feedback applauding the FAAP AC for assembling the group and providing additional insight from national experts. Committee Member Cortez commented that the meeting was a master class in policy formulation, and there were at least nine (9) different levers around the design of a policy related to financial aid that was discussed.

- **Governor's FY2025 Budget**

Chair Gabrieli offered brief comments regarding the Governor's FY2025 Budget. He noted that the Governor's Budget was released last week and stated that it includes proposals that would support expansion that has been executed to make college more affordable, including expansion support for the MassReconnect program. Chair Gabrieli added that the legislative process will take place over the coming months, and he appreciates everyone involvement because so much more can be done. He concluded by expressing the importance of the Commonwealth becoming a more reliable source for financing students.

IV. ADJOURNMENT:

On a motion duly made and seconded, the meeting adjourned at 3:26 p.m.