



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

December 3, 2024

Introduction

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 an update on the Massachusetts State University System.

FY25 Budget Priorities

Last month, the Council of Presidents met for our in-person business meeting at the Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts. It is always a beautiful drive up and over the Berkshire mountains into North Adams. While we never want to be too focused on rankings, MCLA has earned several top spots that they should be very proud of. This fall, MCLA earned the No. 6 spot on U.S. News & World Report's list of Top Public Liberal Arts Schools in the nation, No. 5 as the Top Performer on Social Mobility for liberal arts colleges in the state and No. 2 as the Top Performer on Social Mobility for public liberal arts colleges in the country.

At this business meeting, the CoP set our top priorities for investment in the FY25 state budget which include:

- Advocating for an equitable share of the Fair Share revenue and surplus for the state university system;
- The release of a higher education bond bill which addresses the completion of current projects and new projects as well as deferred maintenance needs;
- Increasing financial aid investment in order to continue to reduce the cost of earning a 4-year degree at our institutions; and
- Investing in student success initiatives so our campuses can better serve the changing demographics of our students.

Additionally, the state universities unanimously support the continuation of investing \$1,000,000 in the State University Internship Incentive Program. This annual appropriation successfully offers paid internships to hundreds of our students through this matching grant program;

investing in the State Universities funding formula line item; full funding of our collective bargaining agreements; and continuation of the FY25 State University SUCCESS Program funded at \$14,000,000. The DHE and EOE have worked closely with the Council of Presidents to develop a distribution formula and program guidelines. The state universities are also working with the BHE/DHE on modeling a Co-op Program pilot for four-year higher education institutions. We are hopeful that this board will support our efforts.

The Council of Presidents remains grateful for the unprecedented investments in public higher education. We also appreciate the investments included in this board's FY26 budget recommendations, particularly with regard to investing in wrap around support services that are critical to our student retention efforts. We will work with Commissioner Ortega and the Department on advocating for inclusion of these budget priorities in Governor Healey's H.1 budget recommendations.

Cyber Ranges

Last month, Salem State University, in partnership with CyberTrust Massachusetts and the Massachusetts Technology Collaborative, welcomed Lieutenant Governor Kim Driscoll and others to the ribbon cutting of its new Cyber Range. This is the fourth of its kind in the state and the only one in the north shore region.

The SSU Cyber Range will provide cutting-edge cybersecurity training through a wide range of real-world simulations that will prepare students and professionals alike with the knowledge and skills they need to prevent and respond to a variety of cyberattacks. Programming is hands-on and simulates data breaches, ransomware attacks and other cyberattacks in a realistic, controlled setting.

Bridgewater State University's Bachelor in Science in Cybersecurity launched in Fall 2024 with 54 students enrolled in the program – four times the number projected for the first year. For Fall 2025, BSU already has received 97 applications compared to 44 one year ago. BSU is also launching a master's degree program in cybersecurity in the Fall 2025 and is currently admitting students to that program. BSU's new cybersecurity program combines classroom instruction with extraordinary hands-on learning opportunities in the state's most sophisticated cyber range where students work alongside professionals in providing real-world threat detection and mitigation to governments, nonprofits and corporations.

These programs strengthen our system's ability to educate the current and future workforce in this growing field. In addition to offering courses across a broad spectrum of academic programs, these universities will partner with their regional municipalities, police departments, small and large businesses, school districts, non-profit organizations, to provide the skills and confidence necessary to navigate the ever-changing landscape of cybercrime.

Westfield State Paramedic Program:

At Westfield State, we have collaborated with three area hospitals, four fire departments and three EMS providers to develop a Paramedic Program, which will be offered in January. This program was designed to support workforce development by establishing a direct career pathway for Emergency Medical Technicians to advance to Paramedics. The coursework includes one year of classroom instruction followed by clinical, field, and capstone internships, and can be completed in two years or through an accelerated 12–18-month track. We developed this program with our partners to address a critical regional demand for highly skilled emergency medical professionals.

Irish Tenors at Westfield State

I would like to end my remarks today by sharing some exciting news from Westfield State. On December 9 at 7:00 p.m. in Dever Auditorium we will host the Irish Tenors in conjunction with our December Board Meeting and Holiday Volunteer Board Reception. The event will bring another important highlight to our building relationship and partnership with Ireland.

The Council is exploring an invitation visit of all COP presidents to Ireland University to discuss international exchange programs.

Conclusion

One of the things that our state universities do very well is responding to needs of the communities in which we serve. Our universities also listen to the voices that can make a difference in inspiring our students. Whether creating opportunities to work with area business to create internships, organizing job and career advisement fairs, or developing pathways to streamline degree offerings, the partnerships that we create builds real relationships that leads to the betterment of our neighborhoods.

Thank you for providing me with the opportunity to share this update from our state universities. I am happy to answer any questions that you may have.