



State Universities
of Massachusetts

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

April 30, 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 you with an update on the Massachusetts State University System.

Educator Alumni Awards

This is an exciting time of year for our campuses. From student leadership awards, to athletics banquets, to poster presentations, to civic engagement awards to commencement; we have a lot to celebrate!

It was great to be back in the State House last Thursday for our annual State University Educator Alumni Awards ceremony. This was our first event since the pandemic, and we were so pleased to celebrate graduates from our nine campuses who have truly made a difference in Massachusetts' public schools.

As you know, the Commonwealth was the first state in the union to recognize the importance of teacher preparation programs. In 1839, we were the first state in the union to establish normal schools that were free of charge to students committed to teaching in Massachusetts. We remain committed to this mission, and the State Universities continue to educate over one-third of public school teachers in Massachusetts, despite our expanded missions which allow us to educate students in multiple disciplines including business, humanities, social sciences, and natural, formal and applied sciences.

Graduates were recognized for their teaching excellence, as well as their contributions to the communities where they live and work. The accomplishments of these individuals are very impressive, and our state universities are proud to lead the way in preparing the next generation

of teachers, educational leaders, and administrators. We were thrilled to acknowledge these nine world-class educators and their dedication to the countless students whose lives they have touched throughout their careers.

There is a lot more to celebrate as we close out the academic year, and I look forward to sharing more excitement with you at my last segmental report in June.

FY25 Budget

Of course, this time of year, the budget remains a top focus for the COP. My colleagues and I wish to express our appreciation to the House of Representatives for including \$1.9 billion in funding for public higher education in their budget, which represents a 4 percent increase over FY 24. We also appreciate the fact that the House mirrored the Governor's budget recommendations for our campus line items, as well as the financial aid line item by including \$80 million of Fair Share funding to expand the MassGrant Plus program.

The Council is also grateful that the House budget includes funding for our state university internship program and dedicates \$10 million for the Public Higher Education Endowment Incentive program, which is an important tool as we continue to grow philanthropic giving. We are further grateful that the House extended the SUCCESS program to state universities so that we can provide wraparound support services that are critical to keeping our students on track to graduate. We have seen how beneficial these services have been to our community college counterparts and believe that they will also help strengthen outcomes for our students facing similar systemic barriers.

While we are very grateful for the funding included in the House budget, there are two shortfalls that were not carried over from the H2 budget recommendations that I would like to highlight.

The first is funding for student behavioral and mental health grants for state universities and community colleges. As college students continue to report anxiety, depression and ideations of suicide and self-harm, our colleges and universities are addressing the need for increased access to mental health training and services. Level funding of the mental health line item will allow our campuses to continue to provide the preventive and supportive resources our students and employees need and deserve.

The other item of concern is funding for public higher education deferred maintenance. As you know, the Governor's budget recommendations included \$125 million of Fair Share funding, which the administration intends to use to leverage capital construction and deferred maintenance bond funds. While the House has acknowledged the need, their budget only included \$10 million for public higher education deferred maintenance, which will significantly hinder this effort. Funding a capital or special obligation bond remains a top priority for the

Council of Presidents, since it is the only way to meaningfully address the conditions of the Commonwealth's public higher education properties.

We have already spoken to Senate members about the importance of these items to our campuses, and we will continue our advocacy efforts to implore them to include these recommendations in the Senate budget. Hopefully, it can be addressed in Conference Committee.

FAFSA

I would like to briefly switch gears and thank the Healey-Driscoll Administration for extending the deadline of the MASSGrant financial aid program to July 1 and for the recent \$550,000 investment in Gateway Cities to boost FAFSA completion. As you are well aware, there has been great uncertainty for our current and prospective students with regard to federal financial aid, and students and families continue to struggle with the challenges that the new FAFSA roll out has caused. These initiatives will provide students and families the time and support they need to complete the paperwork that will give them a clearer picture of how to afford a bachelor's degree and make college a reality.

Commencements

I would like to close my remarks with anticipation for the end of the 2023-2024 academic year. It is hard to believe that our commencement celebrations are just a few weeks away. Our campuses look forward to these ceremonies every year, as they not only provide opportunities to recognize the amazing accomplishments of all our public higher education graduates, but they reinvigorate our campus communities and remind us why we do what we do.

These are, indeed, special moments on each of our campuses. Seeing the smiles, hugs and tears of family and friends, combined with the sound of cheering as our graduates cross the stage is an awe inspiring experience. I am continually impressed with how well prepared our public state university graduates are and how eager they are to contribute responsibly and creatively to their communities and the global society.

These events also provide us with the opportunity to recognize the important work of local, national, and international leaders. If you look at the list of keynote speakers and honorary degree recipients for our ceremonies this year, you will see that our honorees reflect a diversity of opinions and adhere to our practice of promoting equity, fairness and inclusivity. I'd like to share a few examples of who our students will celebrate with this year.

At Salem State University, we are extraordinarily honored to recognize one of your very own with Secretary Tutwiler providing the commencement address at our McKeown School of Education and College of Arts and Sciences Commencement Ceremony. A true partner to Salem

State University in his previous role as Superintendent of the Lynn Public Schools and a staunch supporter of public education in the Commonwealth, I can think of no better individual to inspire our graduates as they embark on the next chapter of their lives as educators.

At Framingham State, graduating seniors requested a keynote who would speak about the topics of mental health and social justice. FSU selected Dr. Alisha Moreland-Capuia (Ka-poo-yah), a noted physician, author, researcher, and trauma expert. Dr. Moreland-Capuia (Ka-poo-yah) is one of the world's foremost experts on trauma, and she has used her knowledge to advocate for important criminal justice reforms.

MCLA will welcome Shannon Holsey, president of the Stockbridge-Munsee Band of Mohican Indians as their keynote speaker Doctor of Humane Letters recipient. President Holsey has dedicated herself to ensuring the tribe members are responsible stewards of their economic, environmental, cultural, and intellectual resources.

Mary Louise McDonald, president of Ireland's Sinn Féin political party and leader of the opposition in the national parliament, will be the keynote speaker at Westfield State University. President McDonald was selected due to her work promoting social justice and democracy as well as her belief in the quality and importance of higher education and her devotion to lifelong learning.

Lastly, Worcester State's celebration will feature Adrienne Haslet, professional ballroom dancer and runner who at the peak of her career survived the Boston Marathon terrorist attack and lost her left leg. Her story of recovery and perseverance will certainly provide a message of inspiration, resilience and hope for their students.

Conclusion

Before I close, I would like to address a recent article in the Boston Globe you may have seen suggesting a consolidation of state universities in the Commonwealth. I wholeheartedly refute this suggestion and point to DHE data that shows our fall 2023 enrollment is up nearly 3 percent, showing the first increase since 2013. While the FAFSA debacle has delayed the release of financial aid information and the commitment of many students eager to make their college selection, we anticipate an increase in enrollment due to the state's historic levels of investment in financial aid. We also expect an increase of transfer students from our community college partners in the next couple of years with their enrollment growth from initiatives like MassReconnect. The suggestion of consolidation is premature and does not take all the data into account.

At the same time, our campuses remain good stewards of the Commonwealth's resources. We continue to tighten our belts, make efficiencies where possible and do all we can to keep costs

down for our students. The Administration sees the value in public higher education, and we need to allow time for their investments to pay off.

Thank you for providing me with the opportunity to share this update from our state universities.

I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

REMARKS FROM MARCH

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 you with an update on the Massachusetts State University System.

First and foremost, I would like to thank the Department of Higher Education for their presentation. Taking any of the complexities out of the financial aid process for our students and our staff is greatly appreciated.

I would also like to congratulate President Vanden Hooven and the Community College System on their successes with the MassReconnect Program. This success is also our success, as many of these students go on to our state universities.

It is hard to believe that the end of this academic year is fast approaching. Many of our students are returning from spring break after taking advantage of unique opportunities offered by our campuses through alternative spring break programs.

At Salem State University, we offered a variety of alternative spring break opportunities this year. I am pleased to report that the Frederick E. Berry Institute of Politics offered its second annual alternative spring break at the State House where students stayed in Boston and met with members of the legislature, lobbyists, and advocates to learn about the Massachusetts legislative process and the pressing issues facing the Commonwealth. We also had students working with Habitat for Humanity in Houston last week and had about 75 students traveling on five international trips to six different countries. These opportunities are often the first time our students leave the Commonwealth, and many were made possible through public and private funds that allow all of our students the same chance to participate.

Many of our campuses provide these unique experiential learning opportunities to students. Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts and Design (MCLA) similarly offered a variety of spring break travel courses to allow students the option to experience the rich culture and history of Ireland, explore the tropical ecology of the Bahamas, and focus on state-of-the-art science and cultural exploration in South Africa. MCLA offered students the option to take a bus tour of the American South to celebrate and commemorate the major milestones and events of the Civil Rights Era. Since 95 percent of the total cost of these trips was donor-funded, all students, regardless of their economic status, had the opportunity to participate in these meaningful experiences.

As you know, many of our students are paying their own way through college and are working one, two or sometimes three jobs to make their dream a reality. Financially supported alternative spring break trips provide our students with life-changing experiences for growth, professional development, and civic engagement that they would otherwise not experience due to cost. We strongly believe that these types of opportunities are important for any college student, and our state university students should be no exception.

FY25 Budget

I would now like to turn your attention to the FY25 budget. A few weeks ago, I testified on behalf of the Council of Presidents at the Joint Ways and Means Committee hearing at Greenfield Community College regarding the Healey-Driscoll budget. While I expressed the Council of Presidents' gratitude for the recent investments in public higher education, as I have done here before, I reinforced the fact that there is still more work to be done. More investment in our students and campus infrastructures is needed for both the personal growth of our students and for the continued economic growth of the Commonwealth and the regions we serve.

In addition to supporting the priorities included in H.2, the Council of Presidents asked the legislature to continue their investment in making public higher education more accessible to Massachusetts residents by increasing affordability further up the income ladder to lower and middle-class families. The CoP supports the Department of Higher Education's system-wide approach to the MassGrant Plus Expansion. Since we believe we must build a system that offers choice to Massachusetts' socioeconomically challenged students, we encouraged the legislature to increase the investment in the MassGrant Plus program by an additional \$75 million.

MassGrant Plus currently offers all students whose families earn under \$72,000 a year free tuition and fees at any of our public higher education institutions. Adding an additional \$75 million to this program would make college free for all students attending any two or four-year public higher education institution, whose family income is under \$110,000 annually. Making this investment is consistent with the accessibility goals of the DHE's Strategic Plan for Racial Equity and addresses affordability in an efficient way. The Council of Presidents asks that you endorse this effort and join us in our request that an additional \$75 million be added to the MassGrant Plus program.

We also requested that the legislature extend the SUCCESS program to four-year institutions. The state universities serve the same students as our community colleges and extending the SUCCESS programs to the state's public four-year institutions will help to improve the outcomes and persistence rates of these students while meeting the workforce needs of the Commonwealth. Extending SUCCESS to our four-year institutions will give us much needed resources to support students through this proven program.

We further requested the legislature continue to support the State Universities Performance Funding line item. The Governor recommended a reduction in this important line item, and we requested recapitalization at \$11.3 million.

Additionally, we asked that the legislature support continued investments in:

- The State Universities Internship Incentive program
- Funding for comprehensive student behavioral and mental health programs, and
- Support of early college and innovation pathways programs. In fact, I will be up at the State House this Thursday to testify about Early College.

I have continually stressed in my past remarks, both to the BHE and to the Joint Committee on Ways and Means on March 1st, the need to change the way the state funds capital construction and deferred maintenance projects on public higher education campuses. The current practice for funding most public higher education capital projects shifts a significant financial burden of these project costs on to our students. Currently, at Salem State University, approximately \$3,000 of our \$11,000 in-state tuition and fees goes towards capital fees for projects already completed on our campus. With the increasing costs of SSU BOLD, a much needed project on our campus, we risk an increase to this fee without additional state support. As we strive to make higher education more accessible and affordable to all, we must consider the impact these capital projects have on our students and find ways to provide them with the modern, academic spaces they deserve without over burdening current and future students with the expense of construction.

The Governor's budget recommendations include \$125 million of Fair Share funding to address capital needs across the higher education system. Although \$125 million is only a fraction of what is needed to begin addressing the condition of our aging campus infrastructure, the administration intends to use this funding to leverage capital construction and deferred maintenance bond funds. The last time the state made any major capital investment on public higher education campuses was in 2008 through a \$1 billion Public Higher Education Bond Bill, which I proudly voted for.

Today, campus infrastructure and facilities needs are so great (in the billions) that a capital or special obligation bond is the only way for the state to meaningfully address the condition of the Commonwealth's public higher education properties. The Council of Presidents wholeheartedly supports the Governor's recommendations and have requested legislative support for this line item.

We are also excited to work with Secretary Tutwiler, Secretary Gorzkowicz and DCAMM on a new process for capital projects on our campuses.

Beacon Hill and Capitol Hill

At the end of February, my colleagues and I held our business meeting at MassArt. It was great to gather at this unique institution where we were surrounded by creativity and innovation with its eclectic combination of galleries, classrooms, studios, and living spaces. It should be no surprise that their graduates, like all public higher education alumni, go on to do amazing things.

I would like to take a minute to congratulate MassArt architecture alumnus Stephen St. Russell and his husband David for being the big winners of HGTV's newest show "Battle on the Mountain," where they successfully competed to add the most value to a mountainside property. Their award-winning design skills are a testament to the value of a Massachusetts public higher education degree.

The day after our business meeting, several of the presidents headed to the State House for advocacy meetings with House and Senate leadership to discuss our state university budget priorities. We received a warm welcome from our elected officials and their staff. It was heartening to hear that our State House leaders understand the critical need for financial investments in our students and our campuses, as well as the importance of being able to offer an affordable and high-quality public higher education.

We also had excellent discussions with legislative leaders around the need to amend the General Laws to permit our institutions to offer Professional Practice Doctorate Degrees, an issue I raised at the last BHE meeting. Our state's workforce is facing a critical shortage of qualified and credentialed applicants for jobs that require this type of degree. It is crucial that the state offer affordable and accessible public higher education pathways to these PPDs. The Council of Presidents is re-engaging once again with UMass about the need to have the state universities offer professional practice doctorates. We would appreciate this Board's support in our efforts to amend this law.

Now let's go from Beacon Hill to Capitol Hill. Last month representatives from the state universities 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 doubling Pell grants and the need to ensure our students have access to mental and behavioral health services. They also highlighted the Council of Presidents' supports of AASCU's efforts to encourage Congress to expand new infrastructure funding to all public four-year colleges and universities.

Conclusion

Thank you for providing me with the opportunity to share this update from our state universities.

I will take one last minute with some bragging rights about some news on campus. Salem State University was recognized as the highest ranked college or university in Massachusetts for social mobility by CollegeNet. This acknowledges the extent to which the university educates economically disadvantaged students (family income below national median) at lower tuition and graduates them into good paying jobs.

I am happy to answer any questions you may have.