



Massachusetts Board of Higher Education Community College President's Report

Bill Heineman, President, North Shore Community College

Chair, Community College Council of Presidents

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

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you all today.

First, I want to take a moment to welcome Secretary Zrike to his first Board meeting. I had the distinct privilege of working closely with Dr. Zrike when he was Superintendent of Salem Public Schools, and I look forward to working with him as Secretary to advance the mission of public higher education in Massachusetts.

I am also delighted, on behalf of my community college colleagues, to welcome Dr. Hara Charlier as the next president of Berkshire Community College. You will hear shortly about Dr. Charlier's background and expertise that make her the right fit to lead Berkshire, but I want to be among the first to offer our warm congratulations on her appointment.

Over the next several months, the community colleges will see several presidential changes. In addition to President Ellen Kennedy's retirement at Berkshire, President John Cook will be stepping down at Springfield Technical Community College. Although we are not quite ready to say our farewells to Presidents Kennedy and Cook, I do want to note for the Board that President John Cox at Cape Cod Community College retired last month – we offer our thanks to President Cox for his years of service and our gratitude to Dr. Carlita Greene who has stepped into the role of Interim President during this period of transition.

As our spring semesters are well underway, so too is our budget advocacy. Two weeks ago, at the Joint Committee on Ways & Means budget hearing on local aid and education, we offered the community colleges' priorities for the Committee.

Most notably, the community colleges are seeking to double our SUCCESS funding from \$14 million to \$28 million for FY27. The SUCCESS program provides wrap-around services for those students historically underrepresented in higher education, including first generation college students, students with disabilities, low-income students, LGBTQ students, and students of color, with supports like advising, tutoring, and transfer and career counseling. Through free community college, enrollment has skyrocketed at our institutions, yet funding for support services like SUCCESS has not kept pace – the Hildreth Institute estimates that the program is

serving just 8% of eligible students at our colleges. Additional funding would allow the SUCCESS program to serve significantly more eligible students.

Another FY27 priority for our institutions is to maintain free community college. As you all know, MassReconnect and MassEducate have brought tens of thousands of new students through our doors. The Governor's budget offers a modest increase to the line which we believe will be sufficient for the program in the coming year.

Of note, however, is a language change that I wish to bring to your attention. In the current GAA, language reads that free community college funds will be applied after "all other sources of federal and state grant aid have been exhausted." The Governor's recommended budget amends that language to read "after all non-loan aid have been exhausted." This change, while it appears minor, would mean that any private scholarship a student receives that is intended to be used toward the cost of books, supplies or other non-tuition expenses, would first be applied to the student's tuition and fees, effectively penalizing students who apply for and receive additional scholarship funds. We are asking that the current GAA language be maintained so that students are able to utilize the full amount of any private scholarships they earn.

Finally, we continue to work alongside the Department on the legislatively-mandated compensation study for our faculty and staff and look forward to seeing swift progress toward a final product.

Amidst a challenging environment for higher education and countless competing priorities, the community colleges are focused on the betterment of our students, the workforce they will enter when they leave us, and the communities in which they will work and live. My colleagues and I are grateful to do the work that we do towards that goal, and again, I appreciate your time today.

Thank you for your continued leadership. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.