



**CoP Remarks on Behalf of the State University System to the Board of Higher Education
April 7, 2026**

Good morning, Chairman Gabrieli, Secretary Zrike, Commissioner Ortega, and distinguished members of the Board of Higher Education.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today on behalf of our State Universities.

Let me begin on a note that reflects the spirit of what our campuses represent at their best. Last week, Westfield State had the honor of hosting Red Sox legend Roger Clemens on behalf of the Westfield Starfires, who play in a local collegiate summer baseball league. Hall of Fame sportswriter Peter Gammons joined Clemens for a conversation reflecting on his remarkable career, the lessons he learned through baseball, and a few of his greatest, and occasionally unbelievable, moments.

It was an exciting and memorable experience for our students and the many fans in attendance.

And I think we can all agree that, regardless of what can only be described as an obvious balk by the Baseball Writers' Association, the Rocket is one of the greatest pitchers ever to take the mound...Cooperstown plaque or not!

FY27 State Budget

Turning to the state budget: Two weeks ago, I testified on behalf of the Council of Presidents before the Joint Ways and Means Committee regarding the Healy-Driscoll Administration's proposed spending plan.

At the hearing I expressed our collective gratitude to both the Administration and the Legislature for their continued support of public higher education.

Today, more Massachusetts students are receiving state financial aid than ever before. Enrollment across the State Universities has stabilized, and, with the support of SUCCESS grants advanced over the past two fiscal years, our campuses are already seeing measurable improvements in student retention and graduation rates.

As we have emphasized in the past, campus line-item appropriations and the State University performance-based funding formula remain critical sources of institutional support. With more than 90 percent of our workforce unionized, contractual salary obligations represent the most significant cost driver on our campuses. Fully funding these commitments remains essential to maintaining affordability for students.

We are grateful that the Governor’s Fiscal Year 2027 proposal annualizes Fiscal year 2026 obligations and includes funding for Fiscal Year 2027 collective bargaining costs.

An equally important funding source, the State Universities performance-based funding formula, was not included in the Governor’s H.2 recommendation. We have requested that the Legislature recapitalize this program by adding \$12.5 million—approximately 3 percent of our appropriation—to support the formula, and I encourage your support for this request.

With regard to student financial aid, specifically the MassGrant, MassGrant Plus, and MassGrant Plus Expansion accounts, we are grateful to Governor Healey for continuing the Commonwealth’s historic investment.

The H.2 proposal provides sufficient funding for Pell-eligible students to attend public institutions tuition- and fee-free.

At the same time, our campuses are working to uphold a broader commitment to affordability by providing a 50 percent reduction in total cost of attendance for students with an adjusted gross income under \$100,000.

Based on an analysis by State University CFOs and Financial Aid Directors, we estimate a \$4.5 million gap in Fiscal Year 2026, growing to approximately \$12 million in Fiscal Year 2027.

We have requested that the Legislature address this gap through additional funding in the MassGrant Plus Expansion account and would welcome the Board’s support in validating this analysis.

We also appreciate the Legislature’s leadership in establishing the State Universities Student Success program.

The Governor’s recommendation to level-fund the program at \$14 million will allow campuses to continue implementing evidence-based strategies that improve student persistence and completion.

The Council of Presidents is also advocating for:

- Level funding for the State Universities Internship Incentive Program;
- Restoration of student behavioral and mental health grants;
- Restoration of the State University and Community College PACE initiative; and
- Funding for Early College.

The State Universities Council of Presidents remains committed to this advocacy, and we are grateful for the partnership that makes this work possible.

Thank you to the Board, the Commissioner, and the dedicated staff at the Department of Higher Education. Our collective efforts ensure that we can continue to provide pathways to a high-quality, affordable postsecondary education.

I would be happy to answer any questions or provide additional information on our work.