



## **Massachusetts Board of Higher Education Community College President's Report**

Luis Pedraja, President, Quinsigamond Community College  
Chair, Community College Council of Presidents

April 8, 2025

---

Chair Gabrieli, Secretary Tutwiler, Commissioner Ortega, and members of the Board: thank you for having me today.

The spring is always a time of great joy on our college campuses – although we still have another month and a half before Commencement season is in full swing, all of our campuses are bustling with (slightly) warmer weather, open houses, campus tours and, notably this year: more students. While I've reported to this Board several times that our student numbers are up – my own college was up 21.4% last fall over the fall of 2022, and this spring across the 15 we're up roughly 18% across the board over last spring – I can speak for all of my colleagues that it really feels that way on campus. Free Community College has brought students back to our campuses in droves.

I will not spend much time today on the uncertainty we are experiencing at the Federal level, other than to say that we remain deeply committed to the community college mission of education for all, which is a nice complement to the MAIPSE guidelines you'll take up later today. Community colleges have always been at the forefront of advancing access for students with disabilities, and we are pleased to see movement on these guidelines. We are grateful to the members of the working group and look forward to continued conversations around implementation.

As we do every spring, we continue to advocate for our budget priorities. For FY26, our colleges are seeking a modest increase in the appropriation for free community college to ensure that we can appropriately handle the influx of students I mentioned earlier. Additionally, we are requesting funding for high-demand short-term workforce training as part of Free Community College – as you've heard us discuss here before, students in short-term training programs – defined as programs of less than 600 clock hours – must pay for their programs out-of-pocket as they are not financial aid eligible. This overwhelmingly impacts programs that are closing gaps in our workforce like CNA, EMT, and IT and we believe that funding short-term training is an important way for us to continue advancing needs in the workforce.

Other priorities for the coming year include support for capital improvement funding, continuation of early college allocations, and an increase in SUCCESS funding. As I've noted before, Free Community College is our access strategy, and SUCCESS is our completion

strategy – without SUCCESS funding, which we are seeking to raise to \$21 million this fiscal year, the new students enrolled at our colleges are less likely to be successful in their studies.

Finally, while our colleges' enrollment increases have boosted access and affordability for our students, our colleges continue to struggle to recruit, hire, and retain qualified staff to instruct, educate, advise, and support those students. Low base compensation is a primary driver of these challenges: after adjusting for cost-of-living, Massachusetts is 25% below the US average for community college compensation and in real values is about 44% lower than California, a state with a similar cost of living. The MTA's study estimated the cost-of-living-adjusted average salary for faculty at community colleges is approximately \$40,000 lower than selected peer states. Even within Massachusetts, the average community college professor makes 33% less than their counterpart at a four-year public institution. If we want to continue leading the nation in higher education, we must invest in our educators and professional staff.

Thank you – I am happy to take any questions you might have.