



State Universities  
of Massachusetts

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

**February 25, 2025**

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### **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.

To commemorate Black History Month and recognize those committed to social justice and inclusive excellence, Westfield State University, in collaboration with the Cities of Westfield and West Springfield, held the second annual Keeper of the Dream Dinner on February 13, 2025. The event included a keynote address on racial advocacy and equity from Nettie Washington Douglass, a descendant of Frederick Douglass and Booker T. Washington. For their leadership and dedication to justice, four Westfield State students and six community members were given scholarships and Keeper of the Dream Awards.

I understand that you have a full agenda for today, so I will be brief.

### **State University Campus Message**

I want to thank Secretary Tutwiler for your public show of support for our system of public education in light of the concerning presidential executive orders and federal administration actions intended to disrupt our work to be a system of public higher education that is open and welcoming to all. All presidents of the nine Massachusetts state universities shared Secretary Tutwiler's message with their campus communities as part of a joint statement from the Massachusetts State Universities' Council of Presidents. It was so important for our campus communities to hear from our state's leaders since these actions seek to undermine the work we are all doing on our campuses to ensure we continue to build "a more equitable education system for all students."

In our system message, my colleagues and I reaffirmed our commitment to our morally-obligated responsibility to offer high-quality instruction, free of discrimination, harassment and intolerance. We remain steadfast in our commitment to offering a diverse learning environment where everyone is respected and valued; which is a cornerstone of our Massachusetts higher education system.

We have shared the State Universities Council of Presidents joint message, signed by all nine state university presidents, with the board for the record. Thank you again to you, Mr. Secretary, Chair Gabrieli and Commissioner Ortega for your leadership.

**Sub-120 Bachelor's Degree:** I want to thank President Clark for representing the views of the State Universities Council of Presidents on today's panel discussing sub-120 credit bachelor's degree programs. The points raised by President Clark represent the views and concerns of our council.

We agree that advancing a marketing initiative, fundamentally changing the established educational and accreditation practice, hidden behind the cloak of affordability for students, is ill conceived and needs to be considered by this board through an educational lens rather than marketing lens. It is important to reiterate President Clark's comments that our state universities are already the most affordable pathway to a bachelor's and Master's degree; if passed, the board is embracing the devaluation of the liberal arts and humanities; there will not be time for incorporation of high impact practices, such as internships into these programs; the question of pathways to Master's degrees has not been answered; and, in the end, if this board advances this proposal, it must also be accompanied by authorization for the state universities to award Associate degree programs in order to stay viable in the higher education marketplace.

We look forward to continuing these discussions and addressing the issues raised by President Clark this morning.

### **Conclusion**

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.



State Universities  
of Massachusetts

February 21, 2025

Dear Students, Faculty, and Staff,

We, the nine presidents of the state universities, write to share yesterday's statement by Patrick Tutwiler, Massachusetts Secretary of Education, regarding federal actions that impact our students, employees, and the Commonwealth:

*“This country has long fought for all students to have equal access to a public education. Resting policy on the denial and retelling of history and demanding that we do so as well is neither sustainable nor acceptable. This is an attempt to take us back decades, exacerbating real inequities that still exist today. Massachusetts will continue to acknowledge and address historical and persistent gaps in student access and achievement, including Black and Brown students, students with disabilities, low-income students and other marginalized student populations. We are working with our Attorney General’s Office to support schools and higher education institutions to continue progress, within the law, towards building a more equitable education system for all students.”*

We stand united with Secretary Tutwiler and write to reaffirm our unwavering commitment to inclusive education. Massachusetts’ state universities have long been dedicated to the fundamental belief that public higher education should be accessible, inclusive, and empowering for all students. Our mission is rooted in the principles of opportunity, access, instructional excellence, academic freedom and the transformative power of education.

We are dedicated to providing a safe and supportive learning and working environment for all our students and employees. Our universities exist to educate, uplift, and empower students from all backgrounds, perspectives, and identities. We recognize that many within our community are experiencing fear, uncertainty, and frustration with the executive actions coming from the federal administration. To those who feel this uncertainty and fear, know that we hear you, we support you, and we will continue to advocate for you.

Please be assured that we are collaborating with the Department of Higher Education, the Executive Office of Education, the Massachusetts Attorney General’s Office, and our colleagues at the University of Massachusetts and community colleges as we all work “towards building a more equitable education system for all students.” We applaud Secretary Tutwiler for his leadership as we navigate the evolving federal actions and impact on our campus communities.

As public higher education institution leaders, we embrace our duty to champion policies and practices that ensure every individual has the opportunity to learn and to thrive. We are guided by our shared responsibility and remain committed to advocating for policies that support our campus communities.

Respectfully,



**Linda Thompson, President**

Westfield State University  
*Chair, State Universities Council of Presidents*



**James F. Birge, President**

Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts



**Frederick W. Clark,  
President**

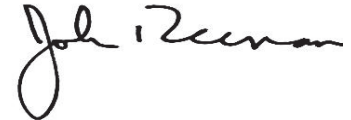
Bridgewater State University




**Mary K. Grant, President**  
Mass. College of Art and Design



**Donna Hodge, President**  
Fitchburg State University



**John D. Keenan, President**  
Salem State University



**Barry M. Maloney, President**  
Worcester State University



**Francis X. McDonald, President**  
Massachusetts Maritime Academy



**Nancy S. Niemi, President**  
Framingham State University