



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

October 1, 2025

Introduction:

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

As the 21st President of Westfield State University and now in my fifth year, I continue to be inspired by the immense talent and potential of our community. The successful and collaborative operation of this university is a testament to the dedication of our faculty and staff, whose teamwork creates a truly unique and innovative educational experience for our students.

This year's opening week was a tremendous success, setting a vibrant and welcoming tone for the new academic year. I extend my deepest gratitude to our Student Affairs team and all our dedicated volunteers. Their hard work, enthusiasm, and seamless collaboration organized a week of events that was both purposeful and fun, ensuring a powerful start to the fall semester.

While my colleagues and I have much to be proud of on our campuses, I will focus my remarks on some opportunities and challenges we face in the year ahead.

Welcome

First, I would like to extend a warm welcome to Dr. Lisa Battaglini and thank her for agreeing to represent the state universities on the Board of Higher Education. With her years of experience serving as a faculty member, department chair, and university administrator, we are certain she will hit the ground running and do an excellent job representing our students and institutions. Dr. Battaglini, we appreciate you taking on this critical role and we look forward to collaborating with you on the major issues facing our public higher education system.

Chair Gabrieli and Commissioner Ortega, now that the state universities have selected our new representative to serve on this Board, my colleagues and I are respectfully requesting that Dr. Battaglini be appointed to the MSCBA Board immediately as our representative. In addition, we also recently became aware that the MSCBA posted for the position for the new Executive Director. It is critical that our system be involved in this search for the new Executive Director

and respectfully request that one president and two CFOs from the state universities be appointed to the search committee tasked with hiring the next person to serve in this pivotal role.

The BRIGHT Act

Last Thursday, we held our Council of Presidents's meeting at Worcester State University. My colleagues and I, along with UMass Chan Medical School Chancellor Dr. Michael Collins and Mount Wachusett Community College President James Vander Hooven, were pleased to be part of a roundtable discussion with Lieutenant Governor Driscoll and representatives from EOE, DCAMM, A&F, and the building trades to highlight the importance of the passage of the BRIGHT Act.

We must modernize our public higher education infrastructure to ensure that our students are learning in classrooms equipped with the tools and technologies necessary to prepare them for today's workforce. Many of our current teaching environments are rooted in a "chalkboard reality," while today's students arrive from technologically advanced high school classrooms equipped with smart boards, interactive displays, and collaborative digital tools. This disconnect not only hampers the learning experience but also undermines our ability to deliver an education that meets contemporary expectations. The passage of this bill is key to ensuring we remain competitive, relevant, and responsive to the rapidly evolving educational landscape.

Financial Aid

I would like to close my remarks with our concerns about financial aid. The MASSGrant Plus Program continues to be an extremely valuable and appreciated asset to our students. That being said, we have added this item to our segmental report, because of a shared concern across all segments of public higher education regarding deficiencies in the state's financial aid financial aid accounts. The expected shortfall in the MassGrant Plus program is significant and without supplemental funding for this program, some students at UMass and the State Universities, who received state financial aid last academic year, will see their awards reduced or eliminated this year. My colleagues and I urge this Board and the Department to join us in advocating for supplemental appropriations be added to the FY26 MASSGrant accounts to ensure that our students have the necessary financial aid needed to continue their education.

Conclusion

Thank you for providing me with this opportunity to share an update from our state universities and I am happy to answer any questions that you may have.