



Affordable high-quality public higher education is essential to expand opportunity in all of our communities and create a more equitable and prosperous Commonwealth.

Higher Ed For All is advocating for fully funded community colleges, state universities and UMass campuses and proposes the following actions to knock down the barriers that too many potential college graduates encounter – and to create a public higher education system that demonstrates its respect for workers by providing fair wages and working conditions.

***Implement a debt-free college plan that covers not just tuition and fees but also living expenses, including food and housing***

There are tens of thousands of Massachusetts students who graduate from high school but don't enroll in college. And there are 700,000 adults in our Commonwealth who have attended college but never graduated. These potential college graduates are disproportionately people of color. Many of them are English learners. They are from low-income households, and they would be first-generation college students. Lack of access to debt-free college limits residents' individual opportunities and hurts the civic and economic life of the Commonwealth, which – more than many other states – depends on a well-educated population.

***Expand existing programs that support student success and address staffing shortages***

- ◆ Our campuses have developed and modeled many effective programs for mentoring, tutoring, and providing intensive support from faculty and staff. Many of these programs, including those funded by the SUCCESS program, have proven effective and have increased graduation rates. The problem has been that they have ended when temporary funding has vanished, and they have never been taken to scale. The state should dedicate permanent funding to make these effective supports widely available to students.
- ◆ In Massachusetts, advisors typically have caseloads of hundreds of students. It is crucial for all students, and particularly first-generation students, to have attentive advisors to help them navigate the complexities of higher education. By increasing the staffing levels of advisors and related support professionals, we can make sure students get the assistance they need to succeed. This will also reduce excessive pressure on faculty and staff.

***Promote the recruitment and retention of high-quality and experienced faculty and staff – and make it possible for them to meet the needs of their students, particularly those who face the most significant challenges***

- ◆ Adjust salaries to account for the value lost to inflation over the past three years.
- ◆ Reform the financing of benefits so the state funds health insurance, pensions, and related costs for all faculty and staff – rather than having students and their families pay through higher tuition and fees.
- ◆ Create wage equity for adjunct faculty and make sure they have access to health insurance, pensions, and paths to full-time jobs.
- ◆ Conduct an Equity Study to examine and implement changes to workloads and salaries:
  - Ensure that there are enough full-time faculty and staff to provide reasonable workloads so they can provide all students with the support they need to thrive.
  - Perform an analysis looking at equity by race, gender, and other non-dominant identities for all faculty and staff positions by examining all wages and benefits and inequities that arise for any other reason (including additional demands on faculty and staff to respond to students who seek them out for support).
  - Set the base salary of full-time faculty at a rate that allows them to make ends meet without having to teach additional courses on top of the 10 a year taught by community college faculty and the eight a year taught by state university faculty. Reducing the need for faculty to teach more than their standard caseloads, which are already high compared to peer institutions, would improve their ability to meet the needs of all students.

***Return to the historic model of public funding for public buildings on college and university campuses and include faculty and staff when assessing campus needs***

- ◆ Ensure campus buildings provide safe and healthy learning and working conditions and help the state meet climate mitigation goals.
- ◆ Fund building initiatives with state resources rather than passing the cost on to students in the form of fees, including funds from public-private partnerships.
- ◆ Have the state pay off outstanding capital debt so those costs are not continually shifted to students. On average, students at Massachusetts state colleges and in the UMass system pay over \$2,500 in fees annually just to cover building debt.
- ◆ Have all new construction and renovations on public higher education campuses incorporate the best practices for addressing climate change and environmental protection.

*The Higher Ed For All campaign is dedicated to expanding access to Massachusetts public colleges and universities and to ensuring that learning and working conditions are equitably meeting the needs of all students and workers.*





# The Cherish Act

## MTA Legislative Agenda, 2023-2024

### Lead Sponsors:

Rep. Sean Garballey (D-Arlington) | Rep. Pat Duffy (D-Holyoke) |  
Sen. Jo Comerford (D-Northampton) | Sen. Robyn Kennedy (D-Worcester) |  
Sen. Paul Mark (D-Becket) | Sen. Jake Oliveira (D-Ludlow)

### Legislation to ensure a strong public higher education system

The Cherish Act establishes a blueprint for a world-class system of public higher education that is urgently needed to meet widely shared goals in the Commonwealth. If passed, it would enable people of all backgrounds in every community to build successful and fulfilling lives; address economic, social and racial equity gaps; meet our state's climate change goals; create high-quality workplaces with fair wages and benefits to attract and retain faculty and staff; enable new discoveries and innovation; and invest in a competitive workforce that is the engine of the state's economy.

#### This bill would:

- Create a program that would enable students to graduate from public higher education debt-free, beginning in FY24 with debt-free community college.
- Invest \$2,000 per high-need student in expanded student support services, expanding the proven SUCCESS program to all of public higher education.
- Ensure eligibility for state health care and retirement benefits for adjunct faculty and part-time staff.
- Establish a Commission on Wage Equity and Working Conditions to recommend changes aimed at eliminating inequities based on gender, race, job category and other conditions and ensure that Massachusetts is competitive with peer states.
- Institute fair and adequate minimum funding levels for public higher education that would be phased in over five years, and prohibit tuition and fee increases during this implementation as long as the state's funding commitment is met.
- Create a commission to assess public college and university buildings relative to health, safety and energy efficiency, and to recommend a plan to bring all buildings into compliance with this standard by 2035.
- Require the state to assume the full cost of state salaries and fringe benefits, future capital construction and renovations to campus facilities, and to pay for campuses' existing capital debt service obligations.

#### Passing the Cherish Act means:

Properly investing in the Commonwealth's most important engine of democracy, opportunity and economic prosperity.

Enabling more people to benefit from public higher education by:

- Increasing scholarship aid to provide debt-free public college for students.
- Creating a debt-free community college program in FY24, and for four-year universities subsequently.
- Eliminating student fees related to capital debt, fringe benefit and payroll costs.

For more information please contact MTA Government Relations

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