



A TOOLKIT TO ADVOCATE FOR PUBLIC HIGHER EDUCATION AFFORDABILITY IN MASSACHUSETTS

#Allin4aDebtFreeFuture

Who We Are

The Massachusetts Education Equity Partnership (MEEP) is a collective effort of civil rights, social justice, and education advocates from across the Commonwealth working together to promote educational equity for historically underserved students in our state's schools. In 2022, in response to local and national conversations regarding access and affordability in public colleges and universities, MEEP partners launched a **Postsecondary Education Working group** to focus on centering equity in public postsecondary policies and programs.

What We Do

01

**DRAW ATTENTION
TO EDUCATIONAL
INEQUITIES**

02

**ADVOCATE FOR
POLICIES &
PRACTICES THAT
IMPROVE
OPPORTUNITY AND
OUTCOMES**

03

**ESTABLISH &
MAINTAIN
STRONG
PARTNERSHIPS**

04

**WORK ALONGSIDE
STUDENTS,
FAMILIES, AND
COMMUNITIES**

To learn more about MEEP, visit, www.MassEduEquity.org

Join the conversation  /MassEduEquity  /@MassEduEquity



TABLE OF CONTENTS

01

Who We Are

02

Purpose of This Toolkit

03

Why Advocacy Matters

04

Education Policy Making 101

05

**Pending State Legislation for
Debt-Free Higher Ed**

06

The Legislative Process 101

07

Opportunities to Take Action:

- How-to Guide: Providing Public Testimony
 - Oral Testimony Guide
 - Written Testimony Guide
- Advocating with your own state Representative and Senator
 - Sample email
 - Sample call script
 - Setting up a meeting
- Sharing your support on social media

PURPOSE OF THIS TOOLKIT

Actively advocating for policies and issues you care about can sometimes feel complex and intimidating - even for the most experienced advocates. We created this toolkit to help you feel empowered and prepared to advocate! This toolkit includes facts and tips for how to use your voice to create positive and lasting change on behalf of students and families, including how-to guides for advocating with legislators and other helpful resources to help you spread the word.

While this particular toolkit is designed to support advocacy efforts to ensure **debt-free public higher education for all in Massachusetts**, you can use many of the tools and guidance materials to advocate for any issue you care about!

Why is debt-free public higher education important?

In Massachusetts' knowledge-based economy, a postsecondary education is a critical pathway to economic security and mobility that can affect not just individual students, but entire families for generations. Yet today, Massachusetts state colleges and universities are unaffordable for many students — **especially for Black and Latina/o/x students and students from low-income households**. In recent years, significant funding cuts for Massachusetts public colleges and universities have driven up the cost of tuition and fees faster than in any other state, leaving many students and parents no choice but to take on higher amounts of student debt or not attend at all. **This crisis has the greatest impact on systemically underserved students**, many of whom already face significant systemic barriers when it comes to higher education access and completion.

Why now?

The Fair Share Amendment was passed by Massachusetts voters in 2022. This new law will provide a **significant influx of new state revenue for public education**, and Massachusetts lawmakers are currently deciding how to spend this new funding. Now is the time to **seize the moment** and take action to ensure policymakers **use these new resources to guarantee debt-free public higher education for all**.



WHY ADVOCACY MATTERS



Massachusetts State Senators and Representatives work for you - the voter. They want to hear about the issues that matter to you!

Each year, state legislators make important policy decisions that impact the funding, operation, and quality of public education across the state. **These policies are often passed with limited input from the millions of students, educators, and families they impact!**



Your voice and experience matter.

Legislators have a lot of competing policy priorities and interests. However, hearing from you - their constituents - can help shape which policies they prioritize and work to advance. Moreover, many legislators aren't always aware of all the implications a particular policy may have on their constituents and communities. Even hearing from a handful of constituents on a specific piece of legislation can help shape a legislator's policy agenda. **That is why your voice matters and needs to be heard!**



Take Action Today.

Using this toolkit, you can let lawmakers know the importance of debt-free public higher education to you and your community, and ensure they are prioritizing this issue on Beacon Hill.

Stay connected with MEEP to learn about future opportunities to raise your voice and make a difference for children and schools! Follow us: [f](https://www.facebook.com/MassEduEquity)/MassEduEquity [t](https://twitter.com/MassEduEquity)@MassEduEquity www.MassEduEquity.org

#Allin4aDebtFreeFuture

Higher education has long been one of society's main drivers of opportunity, social mobility, and economic progress. Yet, today there are glaring — and growing — gaps in who can afford college in Massachusetts. This is why MEEP launched #Allin4aDebtFreeFuture to emphasize the importance of college affordability and support the passage of policies to ensure every student has equitable access to affordable public higher education. If you are #Allin4adebtfreefuture, join our efforts today!

TO LEARN MORE go to MassEduEquity.com and take action today!

101: EDUCATION POLICY MAKING

Who controls public education policies?

Public education is regulated by three different government entities: (1) the federal government, (2) the state government, and (2) local governments (e.g. school committees). Each entity has varying levels of control and input over the policies that determine how public schools are run. In the United States, education policies are largely determined at the state level - through state legislation and/or regulations.



This is why advocating at the STATE level is so important when it comes to advancing meaningful policy changes to improve educational outcomes and experiences for all students!

EDUCATION POLICY: DIFFERENT LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT

	FEDERAL	STATE	BOARD OF TRUSTEES
Level of involvement in regulating public schools	Minimal role	Significant role	Significant role
Role & Areas of control	Provides some programmatic support and funding to states and individual students (e.g. Pell grants)	<p>Sets the major policy goals and standards governing public higher education, but does not control the specifics of day-to-day school operations.</p> <p>Sets statewide policies governing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding & finance • Accountability objectives • Graduation/degree requirements • Certain reporting requirements • Transfer policies among institutions • - more <p>Also supports the coordination of activities between the different institutions of higher education.</p>	<p>Implements the goals set by the state, and establishes institutional policies and rules that govern the day-to-day operation of the school, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Course/program offerings • Staffing • Student codes of conduct • Specific degree requirements • Fees • +more
Who decides?	Congress & the US Department of Education	The State Legislature & Administrative Departments (e.g. MA Board of Higher Education)	Boards of Trustees & School Presidents
Core policymaking levers	Federal Legislation (i.e. bills)	State legislation (i.e. bills) & Administrative regulations	College and University policies

ABOUT THE BILL:

H.1265 & S.823: AN ACT RELATIVE TO DEBT-FREE PUBLIC HIGHER EDUCATION

Bill Sponsors: Representative Natalie Higgins & Carmine Gentile | Senator Jamie Eldridge

What is a bill?

A bill - also known as legislation - is a proposal set forth by a legislative body to change an existing policy or propose a new policy. Bills can be proposed at the federal or state level. See page 7 for additional details on how a bill becomes a law.



What does this bill do?

- Establishes higher education as a right for all students in Massachusetts, including undocumented students.
- Creates a grant program to pay tuition and fees to eligible students at Massachusetts public colleges, universities, or certificate, vocation, or training programs at a public college or university.
- Ensures that funds from this grant program do not affect the eligibility of other forms of aid like state grants, pell grants, Institutional aid, gift aid, or federal aid.

Why does this bill matter?

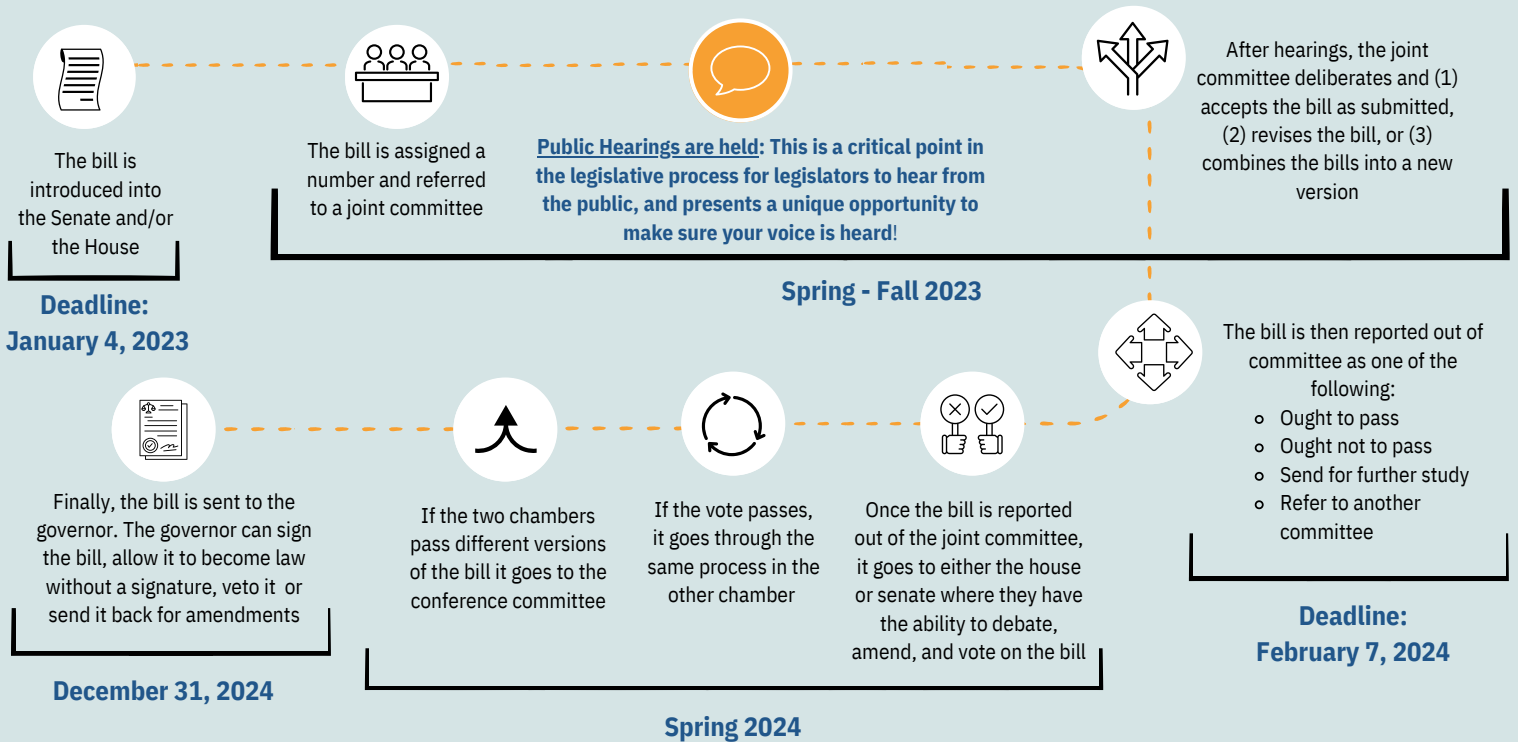
- Historically, public higher education was an engine of economic mobility. Yet today in Massachusetts, public colleges and universities are unaffordable for many students — **especially for Black and Latina/o/x students**, who have less wealth, on average, than their White peers, **and those from low-income households**.
- In recent years, inadequate state funding for financial aid coupled with dramatically rising costs at public higher education institutions has left many students and parents no choice but to take on higher amounts of student debt, or not enroll at all.
- This bill would ensure that high-quality, affordable public higher education is a right--not a privilege--for ALL Massachusetts residents. Ultimately, this will help lead to greater diversity at public institutions and improve the overall health of the Massachusetts economy.

Fast facts

- More than half of US states offer some form of free college program. Massachusetts is **NOT** one of them.
- Despite being among the wealthiest states, MA ranks 37th in the nation in state-funded financial aid for students.
- The cost of public higher education in MA has increased by 59% since 2000, while the average household income has risen by only 13%. As a result, Massachusetts students carry the nation's 5th highest average student debt burden.

UNDERSTANDING THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS 101

A number of steps need to take place for a bill to become law. For you to be an effective advocate for families, students, and educators, it's important to know how the legislative process works and the key moments when your advocacy can have the greatest impact!





OPPORTUNITIES TO TAKE ACTION

In these next few pages, you will find resources and tools to help you take various impactful actions to advocate for **H.1265 & S.823: An Act relative to debt-free public higher education**. These actions range from quick and easy activities to more involved advocacy efforts, including:

- Providing public testimony to the members of the Joint Committee on Higher Education
- Advocating directly with your own state representative & senator
- Expressing your support on social media

Right now, you have the power to make a meaningful difference and ensure the Commonwealth prioritizes debt-free public higher education for all students and families.

DISCLAIMER:

While the following resources reference 2 specific bills - H.1265 & S.283 - it is mainly done for illustrative purposes and does not indicate the Massachusetts Educational Equity Partnership's formal endorsement of these bills.

There are many bills pending before the MA state legislature that seek to improve public higher education access and affordability, and you should advocate for whatever bill resonates with you the most! To learn more about the other bills, see <https://malegislature.gov/Committees/Detail/J29/Bills>.

As previously mentioned, you should feel free to use and adapt the following resources to advocate for any legislation that you care about.



PROVIDING PUBLIC TESTIMONY

Public Hearing

Public hearings are typically organized as a way to gather public opinions and concerns on issues before a legislature, agency, or organization makes a decision or takes action.

Why are Public Hearings Important?

In Massachusetts, state legislators **must hold a public hearing on every bill filed each session**. The public hearing provides a critical opportunity for you to **share your perspective and to be heard** directly by the specific legislators who will determine whether the bill moves forward or not. This is a powerful opportunity to shape the policy outcome and ensure legislators are hearing directly from the individuals impacted by the proposed legislation.

How is that achieved?

Provide oral testimony at the public hearing

OR

Submit written testimony to the committee

How long?

- Typically 2-3 minutes

- No limit, but typically 250-300 words

Who can testify?

- Students, parents, educators, community members

- Students, parents, educators, community members

Deadline for testimony?

- Subject to change, we encourage you to check the website frequently

- Subject to change, we encourage you to check the website frequently

Open to the public?

- Yes, anyone can attend the hearing

- Yes, anyone can submit written testimony

Where can I view the bill's status?

- Learn more about the bill's progress through the legislature [here](#).

- Learn more about the bill's progress through the legislature [here](#).

What's the impact?



Having substantial statewide representation throughout the hearing process from everyone affected by college affordability **helps demonstrate broad support for the legislation and can help sway legislators to take action!**

ORAL TESTIMONY GUIDE

Oral testimony is compelling, especially when you speak from your personal experience. Oral testimony should be quick and specific -- **3 minutes at maximum**. If possible, it is best to deliver your testimony directly and avoid reading from a script. Below you will find some key tips on drafting your testimony, FAQs, and sample testimony you can adapt and make your own.

Helpful Tips:

- ✓ **Check the schedule & Sign up.** Be on the lookout for the public hearing notice, which will be posted **here** and include instructions for signing up to testify in person or virtually. You can also follow us on Twitter **@MassEduEquity** for updates on the hearing.
- **Keep your testimony simple.** The allotted time for oral testimony is 3 minutes. This translates to about 350-450 words .
- **Use your authentic voice.** There is no “correct” way to offer oral testimony – you’re an expert in your experience. In fact, legislators are more likely to respond to your testimony if it is conveyed using your own authentic voice, story, and words.
- **Rehearse your testimony.** Read it out loud and make changes. If you stumble over a particular word or combination of words, choose alternatives that will be easier to say.
- **Relax.** Remember, legislators work for you - the voter! Your perspective matters, and they care about what you have to say.

Oral Testimony FAQs:

- **What if the Committee members ask me a question I don’t know the answer to?** Sometimes committee members will ask you questions after you testify. If this happens, you should only answer those questions you know the answer to and feel comfortable answering. If you don’t know the answer, that’s fine! Simply let them know that you don’t know, but you will look into it and get back to them. *If this happens, make sure to follow up with the committee members after the hearing with the information requested.*
- **What if I need translation services?** Legislators need to hear from everyone! If your first language is not English and/or you prefer to deliver your oral testimony in another language, you should contact the Committee to request translation services.
- **Who else will be at the hearing?** You will be testifying directly in front of the members of the Joint Committee on Higher Education. Other elected officials and members of the public will also be at the hearing waiting to testify.
- **When will I be called to testify?** At the hearing, you will be called up to testify according to where the bill falls on the hearing agenda, as well as the order in which you signed up to testify. Some hearings will last 2-3 hours, and some will last much longer, depending on a number of unpredictable factors. Unfortunately, knowing how long a hearing will last is difficult, so be sure to plan accordingly.



You're an expert in your experience!

ORAL TESTIMONY GUIDE

Components of a compelling testimony:

Introduction

- Greet the committee and thank them for the opportunity to testify
 - *Example: "Good morning Chair Comerford, Chair Rogers, and distinguished members of the committee."*
- Explain who you are – including any relevant details like your name, where you are from, the college you attend (if you are a student), and anything else that is important to share



State your purpose

- *Example: "I am here today to testify in support of H.1265 & S.823: An Act relative to debt-free public higher education."*



Share your story & your "why"

Share why the bill is so important to you. In crafting your "why," you may consider the following guiding questions:

- How has the cost of college influenced your decision to attend an institution?
- Do you receive any scholarships or grants? Did the scholarships help to cover your cost of attendance substantially?
- Do you pay for college out of pocket? If so, is it something you can sustain throughout your studies?
- How much student loan debt are you taking on? In a semester? Year? How much do you project you'll take on by the end of your degree?
- How do you and/or your family pay for the direct (i.e., tuition and fees) and indirect costs (i.e., transportation, books, room, and board)?



Share what the passage of the bill would mean for you and/or your family

- *Example: "If college were more affordable, I would be able to/ would have been able to..."*



Ask for a specific action

- *Example: "I urge you to report this bill favorably out of committee as soon as possible."*



Conclusion

- Thank the committee for the opportunity to speak and offer to answer any questions they may have.

ORAL TESTIMONY SAMPLE

Good Morning/Afternoon Chair Comerford, Chair Rogers, and esteemed members of the Committee on Higher Education. My name is *[Name]*, and I am *[e.g., a student at Bunker Hill Community College; a parent of a prospective college student; an educator at a community college, etc.]*. I am here today to testify in support of House Bill 1265 & Senate Bill 823: An Act relative to debt-free public higher education, which would ensure debt-free public higher education to every student and family in Massachusetts.

[Share your story, including one or more personal anecdotes about how the cost of higher education has impacted your current situation and/or your family].

If you are a student or parent, consider:

- *How has the cost of college influenced you/your child's decision to attend an institution?*
- *Do you/your child receive any scholarships or grants? Did the scholarships help to cover the cost of attendance substantially?*
- *Do you/your child pay for college out of pocket? If so, is it sustainable?*
- *How much student loan debt are you/your child taking on?*
- *How do you and/or your family pay for the direct (i.e., tuition and fees) and indirect costs (i.e., transportation, books, room, and board)?*

Examples

If you are an educator, consider:

- *How has the cost of college impacted your students?*
- *What changes (enrollment or otherwise) have you observed at your college/university as a result of rapidly growing tuition and fees?*
- *What steps has your college/university taken to try to alleviate rising costs for students?*

With the recent passage of the Fair Share Amendment, the time is now to invest in debt-free public higher education for ALL Massachusetts residents. The future health and vitality of our economy depends on it. Therefore, I urge you to report this bill out favorably as soon as possible and ensure the House and Senate pass the bill this year!

Thank you again for the opportunity to share my story and express support for this critical legislation. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

WRITTEN TESTIMONY GUIDE

Submitting written testimony can also be a powerful and impactful way to make your voice heard. Unlike oral testimony, there is no limit on the length of written testimony, but you should still strive to be as brief as possible. Below you will find some key tips for drafting and submitting your own written testimony, along with sample testimony you can adapt and make your own.



Helpful Tips:

- ✓ **If possible, submit it electronically.** Email is the fastest and most efficient way to submit your written testimony. Testimony should be emailed directly to the Higher Education Committee staff, **Rosalind Jordan** (rosalind.jordan@mahouse.gov) and **Brian Rosman** (Brian.Rosman@masenate.gov). In the subject line, you should write: "Testimony in support of H.1265 & S.823."
- **If needed, submit a hard copy.** You can also submit your written testimony via snail mail. If sending a hard copy of your testimony by U.S. Mail, make sure to address your envelope as follows:
Joint Committee on Higher Education
State House, Room 473B
Boston, MA 02133
- **Proofread your testimony,** carefully checking for spelling errors, punctuation mistakes, typos, formatting issues and inconsistencies.

WRITTEN TESTIMONY SAMPLE

[Date]

Chairs of the Joint Committee on Higher Education
State House, Room 473B
Boston, MA 02133

Re: Testimony in Support of H.1265/S.823: An Act relative to debt-free public higher education

Dear Chair Comerford, Chair Rogers, and members of the Joint Committee on Higher Education,

I am writing to express my strong **support for House Bill 1265 & Senate Bill 823: An Act relative to debt-free public higher education**. My name is [Name], and I am [e.g., a student at Bunker Hill Community College; a parent of a prospective college student; an educator at a community college, etc.].

Public higher education is supposed to be an engine of economic mobility. Yet today in Massachusetts, public colleges and universities are unaffordable for many students — especially for Black and Latina/o/x students and students from low-income households. Despite being among the wealthiest states in the nation, [MA ranks 37th in state-funded financial aid](#) for students. Meanwhile, the [cost of public higher education in MA has increased by 59%](#) since 2000, while the average household income has only increased by 13% during this time. As a result, Massachusetts students now carry the [5th highest average student debt burden](#) in the nation.

Refer to page #12 for examples

[If possible, share your story, including one or more personal anecdotes about how the cost of higher education has impacted your current situation and/or your family. For inspiration, refer to the guiding questions from the oral testimony sample].

This bill would ensure that high-quality, affordable public higher education is a right--not a privilege--for all Massachusetts residents, which will help lead to greater diversity at public institutions and improve the overall health of the Massachusetts economy. It will also restore Massachusetts as a leader when it comes to investing in high-quality public education.

With the recent passage of the Fair Share Amendment, the time is now to invest in debt-free public higher education. The future health and vitality of our economy depends on it. Therefore, I urge you to report this bill favorably as soon as possible and ensure the House and Senate pass the bill this year!

Sincerely,

NAME

ADVOCATING DIRECTLY WITH YOUR OWN STATE REPRESENTATIVE & SENATOR

In addition to expressing your support for this legislation with members of the Joint Committee on Higher Education - the Committee that will decide whether or not the bill moves forward - it is also important to **let your own state representative and senator know that you care about this issue**, and urge them to support it as well!

Everyone has one state representative and one state senator elected to represent them in the Massachusetts Legislature. These elected legislators go to work every day to represent you - their constituents! They care about what you have to say, and your voice can have an impact. Even hearing from a handful of constituents on a particular piece of legislation can help shape a legislator's policy priorities. That is why your voice matters! Whether you speak up through a letter, email, or phone call, schedule a meeting, stop by their office, find them at a community event, and/or contact them through social media, the important thing is to make yourself heard.

These next few pages include a step-by-step guide and resources to effectively advocate with your own state legislators in support of debt-free public higher education for all.



As a state representative, I rely heavily on the voices, stories, and perspectives of my constituents to help inform the issues and policies I advocate for on Beacon Hill. That is why it is so important for lawmakers to hear from their constituents about the issues that matter most to them! When you speak, we listen and are better leaders because of your engagement!

- State Representative Manny Cruz (7th Essex District)

ENGAGING YOUR LEGISLATORS: STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE

1

Find out who your legislators are

You can find out who your elected state representative and senator are by [entering your address here](#).

2

Determine the best form of outreach

Next, you will want to figure out how you want to reach out to them. As a general rule, face-to-face interactions are the most impactful way to get your message across, but emails and calls can be highly effective too. You should choose the method of communication that you feel most comfortable with. The below resources can help you do this quickly and easily!

- [Emailing your legislator](#) (page 17)
- [Calling your legislator](#) (page 18)
- [Setting up a face-to-face meeting](#) (page 19-20)

3

Follow up & ensure ongoing engagement

The most effective advocates follow up, engage regularly, and strive to build two-way relationships with their elected officials. Consider taking the following actions to ensure ongoing touchpoints with your elected officials:

- **Follow your elected legislators on social media.** Most legislators are active on social media. Follow them to learn more about what they are working on and the issues they care about. (Helpful tip: Keep it positive! This is not the space to publicly criticize your legislators. If the legislator posts something you disagree with, you should follow up privately).
- **Sign up to receive their newsletters.** Most legislators send a weekly or monthly newsletter highlighting the events, issues, and actions they have recently engaged in. This is a great way to learn more about your legislators and the issues they care about, and the events they will be attending in the community. Most legislators have a website with links to sign up for their newsletters.
- **Show up to local events your legislator attends.** Most legislators will post about upcoming events they are hosting or attending in the community on social media, in their newsletters, and/or on their websites. Find out when these events are and show up to introduce yourself and make sure they know who you are and the issues you care about!

Ready, set, advocate!

EMAILING YOUR STATE REP & SENATOR: SAMPLE EMAIL

To: *[Your state Rep/Senator's Email Address]*

From: *[Your email]*

Subject: Please support H.1265 & S.823: An Act relative to debt-free public higher education

Dear Rep/Senator *[Last Name]*,

I want to first thank you for all you do to represent and serve our community in the state legislature. My Name is *[Name]*, and I live in *[city/town]* in your district. I am also a *[insert additional details that highlight your connection to the community and/or the issue -- e.g., a student at a local community college; a parent of a student who attends the local public high school; a local educator, etc.]*. I am writing to ask that you **support House Bill 1265 & Senate Bill 823: An Act relative to debt-free public higher education**, which is currently pending before the Joint Committee on Higher Education.

Public higher education is supposed to be an engine of economic mobility. Yet today in Massachusetts, public colleges and universities are unaffordable for many students — especially for Black and Latina/o/xx students and students from low-income households. Despite being among the wealthiest states in the nation, [MA ranks 37th in state-funded financial aid](#) for students. Meanwhile, the [cost of public higher education in MA has increased by 59%](#) since 2000, while the average household income has only increased by 13% during this time. As a result, Massachusetts students now carry the [5th highest average student debt burden](#) in the nation.

[If possible, share your story, including one or more personal anecdotes about how the cost of higher education has impacted your current situation and/or your family. For inspiration, refer to the guiding questions from the oral testimony sample].

This bill would ensure that high-quality, affordable public higher education is a right--not a privilege--for all Massachusetts residents, which will help lead to greater diversity at public institutions and improve the overall health of the Massachusetts economy. It will also restore Massachusetts as a leader when it comes to investing in high-quality public education.

With the recent passage of the Fair Share Amendment, the time is now to invest in debt-free public higher education. The future health and vitality of our economy depends on it! Therefore, I ask that you **please support this bill and share your support with the members of the Joint Committee on Higher Education and members of leadership** to ensure this bill is enacted this session!

Thank you for your consideration and all you do to serve and represent our community on Beacon Hill.

Sincerely,

[Name]

[Address]

Refer to page #19 to learn how to find your legislator's contact info

Refer to page #12 for examples

CALLING YOUR STATE REPRESENTATIVE & SENATOR

Calling your state Representative and Senator to express your support for a bill is quick and easy! First, [find their office phone numbers here](#). Next, plan out what you want to say. Feel free to use or adapt the script below when making a call.

Sample Call Script

"Hello, my name is [Name], and I live in [city/town]. May I please speak with Senator/Representative [Last Name]? [If he/she/they are not available] May I please speak with the Chief of Staff or the Legislative Director? Thank you.

If you get the Senator/Representative on the phone:

Hi, Senator/Representative [Last Name]. My name is [Name], and I live in [city/town]. I am also a [insert additional details that highlight your connection to the community and/or the issue -- e.g. a student at a local community college; a parent of a student who attends the local public high school; a local educator, etc.].

I am calling today to ask for you to support **House Bill 1265 & Senate Bill 823: An Act relative to debt-free public higher education**, which is currently pending before the Joint Committee on Higher Education.

This bill would create a grant program to guarantee debt-free public higher education for every Massachusetts resident.

For me/my family, this would mean [include a quick personal anecdote about what debt-free public higher education would mean to you and/or your family].

With the recent passage of the Fair Share Amendment, which will provide millions in new resources for education, the time is now to invest in debt-free public higher education for all.

Therefore, I ask that you **please support this bill and share your support with the members of the Joint Committee on Higher Education and members of leadership** to ensure this bill is enacted this session! Thank you for your consideration and all you do to serve and represent our community on Beacon Hill.

If you get the Senator/Representative's Chief of Staff or Legislative Director on the phone:

My name is [Name], and I live in [city/town]. I am also a [insert additional details that highlight your connection to the community or the issue -- e.g. a student at a local community college; a parent of a student who attends the local public high school; a local educator, etc.].

I am calling today to ask Representative/Senator [Last name] to support **House Bill 1265 & Senate Bill 823: An Act relative to debt-free public higher education**, which is currently pending before the Joint Committee on Higher Education.

This bill would create a grant program to guarantee debt-free public higher education for every Massachusetts resident.

For me/my family, this would mean [include a quick personal anecdote about what debt-free public higher education would mean to you and/or your family].

With the recent passage of the Fair Share Amendment, which will provide millions in new resources for education, the time is now to invest in debt-free public higher education for all.

Can you please ask the Representative/Senator to support **this bill and share [his/her/their] support with the members of the Joint Committee on Higher Education and members of leadership** to ensure this bill is enacted this session?

Thank you for your time and for relaying the message to Representative/Senator [Last name].

SETTING UP A MEETING WITH YOUR STATE REPRESENTATIVE & SENATOR

Face-to-face meetings are the most effective method of communicating with elected officials and their staff. In order for meetings to be successful, they also require some pre-planning and an understanding of the needs of legislators. Ideally, it is best to try and meet with your state representative & senators when they are home in their district offices, when they have fewer distractions from the legislative business. However, scheduling a meeting at their state house office is also feasible, especially on the days that lawmakers will be in the building for legislative sessions.

Tips for Scheduling a Meeting with Legislators

- *The best way to schedule a meeting is to call or email the legislator's office. You can find your **legislator's contact information** [here](#).*
- *If you call the legislator's office, ask to speak with the appointment secretary/scheduler. Explain who you are and the reason you want a meeting with the representative/senator. Make sure to let the office know the purpose of the meeting.*

★ *Ask the scheduler how you can arrange a meeting.*

- **Timing:** *It is important to be flexible with timing - be sure to express a willingness to work around the legislator's schedule.*
- **Location:** *It is also important to be flexible in terms of location - be sure to inquire about the most appropriate/convenient location for the meeting (for some legislators, it may be their state house office; for others, it may be in the district).*



OFFICE HOURS: *Ask the scheduler about opportunities to meet with the legislator during his/her office hours. Ask politely for the dates, times, and locations of the legislator's future office hours.*



VIRTUAL MEETINGS: *A virtual meeting can be a great option, and can sometimes be easier to arrange. When you call to set up your meeting, inquire about virtual opportunities to connect with your state representative and senator.*



For most of the population, it's impossible to cover the price of attending a four-year institution.

-Josue Hernandez, student attending North Shore Community College

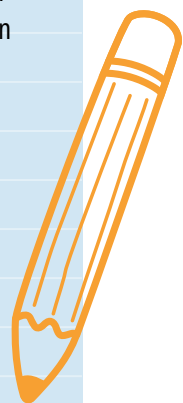
PREPARING FOR A MEETING WITH YOUR STATE REPRESENTATIVE & SENATOR



Meetings with your state Representatives and Senators represent a great opportunity to engage them in a one-on-one discussion about the issues that matter most to you. By sharing key information and personal stories, you can educate your legislators about the issues and help to solidify their support.

Below you will find some key steps and tips for holding an effective legislator meeting:

- **Introductions.** Give them your name and hometown, and any other relevant details to help them get to know you. Remember, legislators are there to serve and represent you. They will be welcoming and want to hear what you have to say. When introducing yourself, it's best to address the legislator according to their appropriate title.
 - **Example:** "Hello Senator [Last name]/ Representative [Last Name], thank you for meeting with me today. My name is.... And I live in [city/town]."
- **State your purpose for the meeting.** Think of this as the introduction to your meeting: What did you come in to talk about? If you are there to talk about specific legislation, it is also helpful to mention the name and number of the bill you will be addressing so they know upfront what you are going to be focusing on.
 - **Example:** I am here today to talk to you about House Bill 1265 & Senate Bill 823: An Act relative to debt-free public higher education, which is currently pending in the legislature.
- **Make it personal.** Share personal stories and experiences to help the legislator understand how the proposed legislation will impact you and/or your family. If possible, provide specific examples to make the legislation real and personal. You want elected officials to understand why you are passionate about this legislation and how their constituents are being impacted by the issue.
 - **Example:** This bill is particularly important to me because....
- **Make the ask(s).** What do you want them to do when you leave their office today? Make sure you have prepared an ask that sets expectations and allows for follow-up. Whenever possible, you'll also want to provide leave-behind materials - such as a bill fact sheet - that support and reinforce your meeting objective.
 - **Example:** I ask that you please support this bill and share your support with the members of the Joint Committee on Higher Education and members of leadership to ensure this bill is enacted this session!
- **Thank them.** Thank them (repeatedly) for their time. If appropriate, reiterate any next steps discussed during the meeting. Also be sure to ask the legislator about ways that you can support them in return.



SHARING YOUR SUPPORT ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Another easy way to advocate for an issue is to spread the word and help increase public awareness through social media! Below you will find some sample posts and graphics you can use to share your support for debt-free higher education on social media!



Facebook
@MassEduEquity



Twitter
@MassEduEquity



LinkedIn
N/A



Email Newsletter
N/A

Hashtags to use across all platforms:
#MassEduEquity, and #Allin4aDebtFreeFuture

What can you or your organization do to support these efforts? Amplify MEEP's higher education affordability campaign on social media with the hashtag #Allin4aDebtFreeFuture on your personal or organizational accounts to widen our reach using the sample posts and graphics below!

Instructions:

- Log into Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, or ALL three platforms!
- Copy and paste the sample post for Facebook/LinkedIn. To post on Twitter, click the "Click-to-Tweet" button underneath the suggested post; Twitter will pop up in a new window. Download which image you'd like to use in the hyperlinked graphics folder below to include a photo.
- Edit the post as you wish and publish it on Twitter, LinkedIn and/or Facebook!



Twitter:

- NEW RESOURCE ALERT! Wondering how YOU can support #studentsofcolor & #lowincomestudents to ensure they're **#Allin4aDebtFreeFuture**? Check out @MassEduEquity's toolkit & videos for more information on #MA #higher education affordability bit.ly/MATools
- #DidYouKnow that affordability is one of the largest barriers to attaining a degree in #MA – but it doesn't have to be that way. Check @MassEduEquity's new resources to ensure we're **#Allin4aDebtFreeFuture** bit.ly/MATools
- @MassEduEquity's **#Allin4aDebtFreeFuture** toolkit shares critical information + guidance so YOU can join us in supporting #studentsofcolor, #lowincomestudents & #FirstGen students to graduate w/o unnecessary student debt. Learn more at: bit.ly/MATools
- One of the key ways to support #MA students in preparing for #HigherEd is ensuring they're **#Allin4aDebtFreeFuture**! Learn more about how YOU can support policy changes to make college more affordable. @MassEduEquity's resources to help you advocate: bit.ly/MATools
- The movement towards educational equity happens with parents, students, & other advocates in the community coming together! Join @MassEduEquity's **#Allin4aDebtFreeFuture** campaign to connect & explore how to bring racial equity to #MA. Learn more: bit.ly/MATools
- How can we advance education equity for #studentsofcolor & #lowincomestudents? @MassEduEquity launched **#Allin4aDebtFreeFuture**, to bring together parents, students & advocates to support policy changes that ensure #MA public colleges & universities are affordable. bit.ly/MATools

SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS CONTINUED...



+ Facebook/LinkedIn:

- NEW RESOURCE! What can Massachusetts do to ensure that our public colleges and universities open the door to new opportunities and economic mobility for students of color, students from low-income backgrounds, and first-generation college students? **#Allin4aDebtFreeFuture** is a campaign by The Massachusetts Education Equity Partnership (MEEP) that shares videos highlighting students' experiences when it comes to college affordability and a toolkit to help you advocate for policy changes that would ensure that no student is denied the opportunity to attend college because it's unaffordable. Explore the campaign and resources at: bit.ly/MATools
- In order to support students of color, students from low-income backgrounds, and first-generation college students to not only attend but graduate from Massachusetts public colleges and universities, we must ensure they can attain a degree without having to take on crippling amounts of student loan debt or being forced to working extensive hours per work to pay for college. We have an opportunity NOW to tackle the glaring - and growing- gaps in who can afford college in the Commonwealth. Here's what The Massachusetts Education Equity Partnership (MEEP) is doing to ensure we are **#Allin4aDebtFreeFuture**: bit.ly/MATools

Email Newsletter Blurb:

Subject: New MEEP College Affordability Campaign

Body: Massachusetts public colleges and universities can open the door to new opportunities and economic mobility for students from low-income backgrounds, students of color, and first-generation college students. Yet, college affordability is one of our state's most significant barriers to attaining a degree. Consider that students from families earning less than \$30,000 annually at a typical Massachusetts state university can expect to pay nearly half their family's income — after grants and loans. But it doesn't have to be that way.



The Massachusetts Education Equity Partnership (MEEP) higher education working group has launched **#Allin4aDebtFreeFuture**, a campaign centering the voices, experiences, and demands of systemically underserved students and families, and resources to help raise awareness and take action to improve public higher education affordability and access for all Massachusetts students.

To learn more, view the videos and toolkit, and explore the dashboard, visit: MassEduEquity.org.



About The Massachusetts Education Equity Partnership (MEEP) Postsecondary Education Working Group

The Massachusetts Education Equity Partnership (MEEP) is a collective effort of civil rights, social justice, and education advocates from across the Commonwealth working together to promote educational equity for historically underserved students in our state's schools. In 2022, in response to local and national conversations regarding access and affordability in public colleges and universities, MEEP partners launched a Postsecondary Education working group to focus on centering equity in public postsecondary policies and programs.

 /MassEduEquity  @MassEduEquity www.MassEduEquity.org

