

Thursday, March 30, 2023

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The Honorable Aaron Michlewitz  
Chair, House Committee on Ways and Means  
24 Beacon Street, Room 243  
Boston, MA 02133

The Honorable Ann-Margaret Ferrante  
Vice Chair, House Committee on Ways and Means  
24 Beacon Street, Room 42  
Boston, MA 02133

The Honorable Todd M. Smola  
Ranking Minority, House Committee on Ways and Means  
24 Beacon Street, Room 124  
Boston, MA 02133

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Dear Chair Michlewitz, Vice Chair Ferrante, Representative Smola, and Committee Staff:

As the House Committee on Ways and Means prepares the Fiscal Year 2024 (FY24) budget proposal for deliberation by the House of Representatives, we — the undersigned civil rights, social justice, and educational equity organizations — write to ask that you ensure your emphasis on educational equity is reflected in the budget proposal. We thank you for your continued leadership to support the needs of systemically underserved students by securing additional resources to address the significant impacts of COVID-19 throughout previous annual budgets.

Earlier this month, the Healey-Driscoll administration submitted its first budget proposal, which includes substantial new investments from early childhood and care through postsecondary education to improve outcomes for historically underserved students. We are especially encouraged by the significant investments for financial aid expansion for students attending our state's public colleges and universities, Child Care Stabilization Grants that support the early education and care sector, and the historic increase in Chapter 70 to support our state's highest-need school districts, which will provide critical resources to students who have been underserved in our education system for far too long.

The Healey-Driscoll administration's budget proposal is a strong start in the FY24 state budget process, but it is only the first step. We urge you to build upon the following investments proposed:

**1 Investing in early education and care.** High-quality early childhood education is critical to children's future success — but in our state, children of color and children from low-income backgrounds do not have the same access to quality programs as their White and more affluent peers. Even before the pandemic, 62% of Massachusetts residents in low-income neighborhoods lived in childcare deserts. Moreover, the high cost of child care puts early education out of reach for many families, especially for educators in the sector — most of whom are women and many of them people of color — often making only minimum wage. To address these interrelated challenges that COVID-19 has only exacerbated, the Healey-Driscoll administration has recommended an infusion of millions of dollars into the early education and care system, including \$475 million for C3 stabilization grants, \$25 million for financial assistance to low-income families, and \$46.7 million for early education and care quality improvement. To ensure that all children get the start in life they deserve, we urge you to maintain the levels of funding proposed by the Healey-Driscoll administration in your upcoming budget. [View the early education and care community's full FY24 budget ask here.](#)

- 2 Funding the Tomorrow’s Teachers Scholarship Program at \$15 million.** A racially and culturally diverse teacher workforce benefits all students— particularly students of color, who often thrive in classrooms led by teachers who share their racial and cultural backgrounds. Yet, in Massachusetts, people of color make up only 9% of teachers. To attract and retain a diverse population of individuals to enter the teaching profession, reduce the educational loan debt for currently employed teachers, and eliminate teacher shortages, the Massachusetts Fiscal Year 2023 Budget included \$15 million in appropriations for a teacher scholarship and loan repayment assistance program. To continue the state's commitment to increasing educator diversity, we urge you to maintain FY23 levels of funding for the Tomorrow's Teachers Scholarship Program and expand the program to paraprofessionals.
- 3 Investing in necessary supports and resources for English learners (ELs).** For years, data has laid bare the systemic disparities that undermine the educational experiences and outcomes of underserved students in our state – especially English learners. It is clear that the pandemic disproportionately impacted these same students and their families and has exacerbated pre-existing educational inequities. An example of this is that the 2022 MCAS results indicate that only 16% of English learners met grade-level expectations in 3rd grade ELA – a drop of 8 percentage points since before the pandemic. English learners are a rapidly growing and diverse population entitled to English language development instruction that will allow access to high-quality academic content. Yet, the Healey-Driscoll administration proposed a nearly \$1.4 million reduction for English Language Acquisition and English Language and Literacy Programs. Many districts have struggled to adequately support English learners – even prior to the pandemic – and a decrease in funding would only hinder students’ English language development and their long-term success. Therefore, we urge you to increase funding for these two line items to, at minimum, the FY23 levels of \$10.3 million in your budget.
- 4 Investing in the Student Opportunity Act (SOA).** The Healey-Driscoll administration’s budget proposal recommends fully funding the Student Opportunity Act, landmark legislation that commits to investing an additional \$2.2 billion in Massachusetts schools over a period of seven years to dramatically improve learning experiences and outcomes for systemically underserved students. This additional funding will help tackle long-standing funding inequities between the Commonwealth’s highest need and wealthier districts. As we enter the third year of SOA implementation, we encourage you to keep the interests of historically underserved students at the center of this budget.
- 5 Investing in student financial aid.** More than 80,000 students across the Commonwealth receive state financial aid. Yet, Massachusetts is ranked 28th nationally for public financial aid as a percentage of education appropriations compared to other states. While access to these resources has eased the financial burden for many students and families, the reality is that today, state-funded financial aid has less impact and value as the cost of attending colleges and universities has steadily increased. In addition to these funds covering smaller fractions of the cost of college, the inequitable distribution of aid across our higher education sectors leaves systemically underserved students, at times, no choice but to take on burdensome amounts of student loan debt, work longer hours, and/or have to take fewer classes — all barriers that reduce their chance of success. Therefore, we urge you to maintain the Healey-Driscoll administration’s recommendation of \$93 million for the expansion of financial aid for students attending our state’s public institutions of higher education. Additionally, we urge you to maintain the \$59 million proposed by the Healey-Driscoll administration to stabilize tuition and fees at public institutions so that this expansion of financial aid has the intended impact on students and families.

**6 Investing in wraparound services for colleges to provide more student support.** Evidence shows that colleges can significantly increase students' ability to stay in school and complete their coursework by investing in culturally sustainable wraparound support services, such as peer mentoring, academic skills workshops, transportation stipends, dependent care support, and targeted academic, career, transfer, and scholarship advising. In Massachusetts, we have made headway to ensure higher education is more inclusive by creating the Supporting Urgent Community College Equity through Student Services (SUCCESS) Fund. This fund is key to providing access to wraparound services and supports essential for students attending community college across the state. We encourage you to maintain the Healey-Driscoll administration's proposal to increase the SUCCESS Fund by \$4 million while also including an additional \$30 million for our state's public higher education institutions to ensure that all students, whether full- or part-time, have access to necessary supports and services.

**7 Investing in Early College.** In a few short years, Massachusetts has taken a significant step forward to promote educational equity by investing in and expanding early college programs. Data show that Early College programs double the odds of a student immediately enrolling and persisting to a second year of college. According to the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Massachusetts students who persist into a second year of college are seven times more likely to complete their degree than those with an interruption in postsecondary enrollment. But despite these findings, Early College programs in Massachusetts are reaching only 2% of high school students, underscoring the need for state leaders to increase investments to ensure all students have access and are exposed to college-level coursework and different career pathways before they graduate high school. We must — and can — do better to ensure that all students, especially students of color, students from low-income backgrounds, and first-generation college-goers, have authentic access and necessary supports to succeed and graduate from college. As such, we support the MA Alliance for Early College coalition's recommendation of \$27.6M for Early College.

The decisions you make now on how much to invest, as well as where and how to invest that funding, will significantly impact the educational outcomes and lives of students for years to come.

We respectfully request that the House Committee on Ways and Means' FY24 budget proposal represent a continued commitment to providing the resources and supports that students need as we continue recovering from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic – as well as work to overcome decades of systemic inequity and underinvestment – by including these investments.

Thank you for your attention to this letter. Please reach out to the undersigned groups if we can share more information about how these investments would support the success of the students, families, and educators we represent.

Respectfully submitted,

