

**June 20, 2024**

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

The Honorable Michael Rodrigues  
Chair, Senate Committee on Ways and Means  
24 Beacon Street, Room 212  
Boston, MA, 02133

The Honorable Ann-Margaret Ferrante  
Vice Chair, House Committee on Ways and Means  
24 Beacon Street, Room 238  
Boston, MA 02133

The Honorable Cindy Friedman  
Vice Chair, Senate Committee on Ways and Means  
24 Beacon Street, Room 313  
Boston, MA 02133

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

The Honorable Patrick O'Connor  
Ranking Minority, Senate Committee on Ways and Means  
24 Beacon Street, Room 419  
Boston, MA 02133

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Dear Esteemed Members of the FY25 Budget Conference Committee,

On behalf of the students, educators, and families across the Commonwealth whom we work with and support, we—the undersigned civil rights, educational equity, and social justice organizations—write to express our appreciation for the numerous provisions in the House and Senate FY25 budgets that demonstrate a strong commitment to educational equity and justice.

As you engage in the Conference Committee process, we acknowledge the competing funding priorities you must negotiate to formulate the FY25 budget. However, few are as crucial as supporting and investing in policies and programs that uphold the Commonwealth's commitment to racial, economic, and educational equity. Moreover, the Conference Committee is uniquely positioned to use the higher-than-expected surtax revenue, specifically earmarked for education and transportation, to make bold investments in equitable programs and policies that increase educational opportunities for our state's students of color and students from low-income backgrounds. Therefore, we urge you to include the following in the final FY25 Conference Committee budget:

- 1 Invest in Early Childhood Education and Care.** High-quality early childhood education is critical to children's future success — but in Massachusetts, children of color and children from low-income backgrounds do not have the same access to quality programs as their White and more privileged peers. Additionally, the high cost of childcare makes early education unattainable for many families. To address these interconnected challenges and ensure that all children receive the solid start in life they deserve, we urge you to include the following appropriations in the final FY25 conference budget:
  - \$80 million (Senate Level) for childcare affordability ([1596-2435](#)).
  - \$32.5 million (Senate Level) for the Commonwealth Preschool Partnership Initiative (\$17.52 million in [3000-6025](#) & \$15 million in [1596-2412](#)).
  - \$10 million (House level) for EEC Provider Higher Education Opportunities (3000-7066)

- 2 Fully Fund the “Literacy Launch” Initiative.** Research shows that students who read proficiently by third grade are set up for academic success. Yet, in our state, less than half of all students in third grade are meeting English Language Arts (ELA) benchmarks, with especially concerning outcomes for underserved students. To address this literacy crisis—undoubtedly one of our state’s most urgent education equity issues—we urge you to fully fund the new early literacy line item ([1596-2437](#)), also referred to as “Literacy Launch,” in the final FY25 conference budget at **\$30 million (House Level)**. To maximize the use of these new funds and drive meaningful change, we also urge you to pass [H.4423](#), *An Act to promote high-quality early literacy instruction and improve student outcomes*, ensuring that all students in the Commonwealth have equitable access to high-quality, evidence-based reading instruction.
  
- 3 Fully Fund the Student Opportunity Act by Fixing Underinflation in Chapter 70.** Under the current law, the Chapter 70 inflation adjustment is capped at 4.5%. However, inflation rates have far surpassed this threshold, reaching 8% and 7% in FY24 and FY23, respectively. As a result, districts have not received adequate state funds to cover the rising costs at the local level, resulting in a failure to meet the real-dollar targets outlined in the Student Opportunity Act (SOA). This, coupled with the looming ESSER fiscal cliff, has placed significant financial strain on school districts across the Commonwealth, and many are now facing tough decisions, reluctantly considering measures such as staff reductions and cuts to critical student supports and programs. The good news is that there is an opportunity to rectify this situation and alleviate the compounding impact of underinflation on school district budgets by utilizing the additional surtax revenue to address the inflation gap. Specifically, we recommend that the state **promptly pass a supplemental budget that includes a legislative fix and additional funding to compensate for lost inflation over the last two years**. Importantly, this action would result in a significant and much-needed increase in Chapter 70 aid for Gateway Cities, which often have fewer local resources to fully support student needs.
  
- 4 Continue to Enable the Growth and Expansion of Early College Programs.** Early college programs offered transformative opportunities that enhanced college and career success for over 8,000 Massachusetts students this school year—particularly for students of color, first-generation college-goers, and students from low-income backgrounds—who often face more barriers to attaining a college degree. As such, we urge you to include at least \$33.25 million across the following line items:
  - \$15.15 million (House level) for Early College programs ([7009-6600](#))
  - \$13.1 million (Senate Level) for Dual Enrollment Grants ([7066-0019](#))
  - \$5 million (Senate Level) for Early College & Innovation Pathways ([1596-2413](#))
  
- 5 Prioritize Equity in Higher Education Funding.** While our state has made incredible strides in recent years to lay the groundwork for a public higher education system where all students can pursue their degrees without financial barriers, there's still much work to be done. Despite the commendable investments proposed during the FY25 budget process, thousands of students from low-income backgrounds and Black and Latino students will continue to encounter significant obstacles related to access, affordability, and degree completion compared to their White peers, who often have greater financial resources. To address these challenges, Massachusetts must adopt a systemic and equity-centered approach to ensure that college is truly affordable for all. In pursuit of this goal, we recommend the following:

- **Target resources to students who need them most while covering the total cost of attendance for students from low-income backgrounds.** As equity-focused advocates, we are concerned that implementing free community college for all, as proposed in the Senate Budget, will prematurely direct a disproportionate share of new resources to upper and middle-income families. Instead, we recommend a targeted approach that prioritizes resources to fully support students facing the greatest obstacles. This support should extend beyond tuition and fees to cover indirect costs such as room and board, transportation, childcare, books, and course materials, which can make up over half of the total cost of college. Therefore, we recommend that the state adopts a phased-in approach that:

- Prioritizes covering the total cost of attendance for lower-income students at both 2-year and 4-year public institutions, which could be achieved by doubling the Pell Grant amounts for eligible students.
- If sufficient funds remain after fully addressing the needs of lower-income students, the program should be expanded to provide universal access for all residents, regardless of income.

This approach ensures that resources are directed where they are most needed while gradually extending benefits to all residents.

- **Prioritize investment in programs and strategies proven to close the completion gap.** Evidence demonstrates that colleges can greatly enhance students' ability to persist in their studies and successfully complete coursework through investments in culturally sustainable wraparound support services. The SUCCESS Fund exemplifies this approach with its proven track record in Massachusetts. Therefore, we strongly advocate for the inclusion of the following appropriations in the final FY25 conference budget:
  - \$18.3 million (Senate Level) in the Community College SUCCESS fund ([7100-4002](#)); and
  - \$14 million (House Level) for SUCCESS Fund Expansion to support wraparound services for students at 4-year institutions ([1596-2439](#))
- **Invest in financial aid that allows students to choose the institution that best meets their unique needs and interests.** We urge you to sustain these recent historic investments by including:
  - \$105 million (Senate Level) for Financial Aid Expansion ([1596-2414](#));
  - \$175.7 million (Senate Level) for the MA State Scholarship program ([7070-0065](#)).
- **Invest in Higher Education initiatives that help improve educator diversity.** Addressing the financial barriers to staying in the teaching profession is a critical strategy for improving the diversity of the educator workforce. Therefore, we urge you to include the following appropriation in the final FY25 conference budget:
  - \$10 million (House Level) for the Tomorrow Educator's Scholarship program ([7061-9805](#)), including \$5 million for the scholarship and \$5 million for educational debt repayment assistance.

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.

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 and families we represent.

Respectfully submitted,



*Michael Moriarty*  
Member of the Massachusetts Board of  
Elementary and Secondary Education

