

March 24, 2026

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

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

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Dear Chair Michlewitz, Representative Smola, and Committee staff:

As the House Committee on Ways and Means prepares its Fiscal Year 2027 (FY27) budget proposal for consideration by the House of Representatives, we—the undersigned civil rights, social justice, and educational equity organizations from across the Commonwealth—write to urge you to advance a budget that boldly reflects a durable and unapologetic commitment to educational equity. We deeply appreciate your leadership in addressing the needs of students who have been historically and systemically underserved, especially through investments that are beginning to close long-standing gaps in access, opportunity, and outcomes across Massachusetts.

As Governor Maura Healey emphasized in her State of the Commonwealth address, the Commonwealth's prosperity begins with education. We applaud her commitment to expanding Universal Pre-K, improving literacy through targeted investments and tutoring, strengthening high school graduation standards, and setting the ambitious goal of enrolling 100,000 students in Early College over the next decade. These initiatives are not only sound fiscal policy but also reaffirm Massachusetts' responsibility to ensure every student, regardless of zip code or background, can access a high-quality public education.

In this moment of heightened uncertainty and growing need, Massachusetts must not only sustain but deepen its commitment to educational equity as public education systems grapple with rising costs, workforce shortages, and the erosion of federal protections and resources that disproportionately support our most vulnerable students. In this context, the Commonwealth has both an opportunity and an obligation to lead, demonstrating that sustained, equitable investment in education is essential to our economic vitality, democratic health, and long-term prosperity.

While the administration's FY27 proposal represents meaningful progress, it cannot be the ceiling of our ambition. We recognize the competing priorities inherent in crafting an FY27 budget amid a turbulent political climate. However, if Massachusetts takes pride in its top ranking on the Nation's Report Card, that pride must translate into consistent, sustained investment to ensure that every student—not just some—benefits from this achievement.

Investing in education is transformative. This truth is evident not only in the data but also in the daily experiences of our students: aspiring engineers attending schools without sufficient math support; teenagers seeking guidance while counselors are stretched too thin; children struggling to focus amid food insecurity. These barriers disproportionately affect students who are furthest from opportunity: those from low-income backgrounds, multilingual learners, and Black and Latino communities. We have the resources—and the moral responsibility—to do better.

**As the Committee considers its FY27 proposal, we respectfully urge you to prioritize the following key investments that will ensure every student has the support and opportunity to succeed:**

**1 Increase Early Education and Care (EEC) Investments.** Establishing universal pre-K in Gateway Cities has rightly been a priority of Governor Healey's. Pre-K is more than a school program—it is a social and economic strategy that gives children a strong foundation, supports families, and reduces systemic inequities. Since the launch of the Gateway to Pre-K initiative in January 2024, the goal has been clear: by the end of 2026, every family with a 4-year-old in the state's 26 Gateway Cities should have access—at low or no cost—to a high-quality preschool program that prepares children for kindergarten. We appreciate recent increases in investment and urge the Legislature to build on this momentum to ensure the Commonwealth fulfills its commitment. Without sustained funding, families will continue to lack access to the early learning opportunities their children deserve.

- **Increase Access to Income-Eligible Child Care and Workforce Supports: \$31.2 million (increase to line item 1596-2411).** This funding would reopen Child Care Financial Assistance (CCFA) for 2,000 income-eligible children currently on the waitlist. To maintain current caseloads, address anticipated growth in DCF/DTA-related care, and annualize the FY26 rate increase, an overall investment of \$133 million above FY26 levels is needed. The \$31.2 million increase should also include \$8 million in child care assistance for early educators—a proven strategy to recruit and retain the workforce.
- **Commonwealth Cares for Children (C3) Operational Grants: \$510 million (increase to line items 3000-1045 and 1596-2410).** Since 2021, C3 has been level-funded at \$475 million, even as operating costs have risen significantly. As a result, more than 600 eligible providers currently receive no C3 support. Increasing funding would allow the Department of Early Education and Care to sustain existing programs and expand access to new providers, helping to avoid harmful tradeoffs that could destabilize the sector.

As outlined in the FY25 budget language, C3 is also central to increasing educator wages. With new, ongoing revenue anticipated from iLottery in FY27, the Commonwealth has an opportunity to invest additional funds to strengthen the Operational Grant Fund and support wage growth—without supplanting existing C3 funding.

- **Commonwealth Preschool Partnership Initiative (CPPI): \$31.95 million (Increase to line items 3000-6025 and 1596-2412).** This funding would move current planning grantees into implementation and enable more communities—including the remaining Gateway Cities—to participate in the program. CPPI fosters partnerships between school districts and providers to expand access to affordable, high-quality preschools, enhance local program quality, and support equitable access to special education and inclusion.

- 2 Increase Investments in Early Literacy.** According to the latest MCAS data, fewer than half of Massachusetts third graders are meeting grade-level expectations in English Language Arts—a deeply concerning fact, particularly for underserved students. This ongoing crisis demands immediate action. **The administration has proposed \$25 million for the “Literacy Launch” initiative (line item 1596-2437)**, which is a crucial step forward, and we urge the House to preserve this critical investment in the House Ways and Means budget. Early data from evaluations conducted by researchers at Johns Hopkins University show that high-dosage, one-to-one and small group tutoring funded through Literacy Launch has produced significant, measurable gains in foundational literacy skills among participating first graders across 13 high-need Massachusetts districts. Students receiving daily tutoring gained the equivalent of more than five additional months of learning compared to national norms and similar peers, and gains were consistent across student groups, suggesting the potential to reduce persistent opportunity gaps. Importantly, these improvements were sustained over time, with students maintaining stronger reading outcomes as they progressed into second grade. This funding will continue to support meaningful progress in addressing one of the state’s most pressing education equity challenges. These resources are essential for making real progress on one of the state’s most urgent education equity challenges. With the recent passage of H.4683 in both the House and Senate, now is the time to expand and target funding for the literacy resources and supports our students desperately need. The national movement toward high-dosage tutoring in public schools began right here, in Boston, in 2004; we should continue to lead and expand this effort.
- 3 Expand Access to Universal Free School Meals.** Food insecurity touches every community in Massachusetts, but its effects are far from equal. Child food insecurity rates have nearly doubled in the past five years—from 19% in 2019 to 37% in 2024. The burden falls especially hard on Black and Latino households, with rates of 46% and 62%, respectively. Students cannot excel or engage in school if their fundamental needs go unmet. Consistent access to nutritious meals is essential for learning, focus, and overall well-being. **The administration’s proposal of \$198 million for universal free school meals (line item 1596-2422)—an \$18 million increase over FY26**—demonstrates a crucial commitment to ensuring every student, regardless of income, has access to healthy food throughout the school day.
- 4 Investment in Early College Programs.** Early College programs are among the highest-impact strategies for boosting college success, particularly for students who have historically been underrepresented on college campuses. Expanding these opportunities is essential for the Commonwealth’s next generation and for strengthening the state’s economy and workforce. To meet the Governor’s ambitious goal of serving 100,000 students over the next decade, we urge the Legislature to sustain the funding levels proposed by the Healey-Driscoll Administration: **\$15 million for line item 7009-6600, \$12.9 million for line item 7066-0019, and \$11.2 million for line item 1596-2510, including \$6 million dedicated specifically to Early College.**
- 5 Invest in SUCCESS Programming Statewide.** To build on recent expansions in college access, we urge a bold increase in funding to scale the Supporting Urgent Community College Equity through Student Services (SUCCESS) program (line item 7100-4002) across all 15 campuses. This investment would guarantee every student access to coordinated, evidence-based supports proven to boost persistence and completion. With current funding of \$14 million reaching just 8% of students, **doubling the appropriation to \$28 million** would significantly expand access and advance the program toward a truly comprehensive model that integrates proactive advising, case management, and basic needs assistance.

Enhancing our education system is paramount in addressing the deeply entrenched systemic disparities within our state. By directing resources to our highest-need students, we take a significant step toward solidifying our dedication to a more just and inclusive society. Now, more than ever, is the time to act decisively—we urge you to seize this opportunity to ensure that each child is afforded the opportunity to thrive and achieve their full potential.

Thank you for your attention to this letter. If you need more information on how these investments can support the success of the students and families we represent, please feel free to contact the undersigned groups.

Respectfully submitted,

