



State University Council of Presidents

Testimony delivered by President Mary K. Grant

Joint Committee on Ways and Means 3.13.2023

Thank you, Senator Comerford and Representative Vargas and members of the committee for the invitation, and the opportunity to provide testimony on Governor Healey's FY 24 budget recommendations.

I have the pleasure of representing the 9 Presidents of the State University Council of Presidents. Massachusetts has six comprehensive state universities — Bridgewater State University, Fitchburg State University, Framingham State University, Salem State University, Westfield State University, and Worcester State University—and three specialized colleges — Massachusetts Maritime Academy, Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts, and Massachusetts College of Art of Design – the only free-standing public college of art and design in the nation. I am proud to have the privilege of serving as President of your Art and Design School – MassArt.

At MassArt, we are celebrating our 150th Anniversary and a legacy of leadership, preparing students from diverse backgrounds to contribute to the world as artists, designers, makers, educators, innovators, leaders, and entrepreneurs, and to make a difference in their communities and around the world.

In the early 1870's state leaders had the foresight to make an inspired investment in our Commonwealth's future. The understanding that an arts education will lead the next generation forward with the skills, creativity, and courage necessary to tackle an ever-changing world and economy is just as true today as it was in 1873.

As a public institution, we instill in our community the notion that it is our obligation to serve, to give back to our communities, and to work for the common good, the “commonwealth.” This means that access is in our DNA – it is not optional, it is imperative. We continue to lead with these values and to work hard every day to ensure that an excellent art and design education is accessible and affordable to all who aspire and have talents to be developed and cultivated.

Together, the State Universities enroll approximately 45,000 students. 95% of our students come from Massachusetts high schools and 85% of our graduates choose to live, work, and raise their families in the Commonwealth.

My colleagues and I, along with our dedicated faculty and staff, are committed to preparing students for professional careers, lifelong learning, and civic engagement by providing a strong grounding in the liberal arts as well as rigorous academic curricula and opportunities, including undergraduate research, international study, internships, and service-learning opportunities. We are a critical resource to the Commonwealth, producing a steady stream of community leaders, industry innovators, and skilled professionals who drive our economy.

Governor Healey’s spending plan represents the most significant investment proposed by any administration in our public higher ed system in decades. We applaud the Governor for this bold proposal and we respectfully request that the House and Senate embrace the funding levels included in the H.1 recommendations.

The Governor’s spending plan recognizes the complexity of public higher education financing, the burden on our students and their families, and signals that funding Public Higher Education is a priority and a necessary investment for our Commonwealth.

The Council of Presidents strongly supports the Administration’s proposals, which recognize the needs of our students and campuses by:

- Significantly expanding the MassGrant Plus program to provide need-based financial assistance;
- Recapitalizing the State Universities Performance Based funding formula;
- Funding comprehensive student success supports; campus-based equity, diversity and inclusion

- initiatives, and student behavioral and mental health programs;
- Expanding early college and innovation pathways programs, and
- Investing in capital construction and maintenance on our campuses.

Governor Healey also proposes a plan that invests \$59 million of Fair Share revenues in our public higher education institutions. This infusion of new funding is for tuition and fee stabilization for students attending one of our 29 institutions across the Commonwealth.

At just over \$11,000 per year, state universities offer some of the most affordable pathways for an undergraduate degree in New England. However, underfunding of public higher education institutions, especially institutional cost drivers such as collective bargaining, fringe benefit obligations, and deferred maintenance, has resulted in campuses cutting where they can, and adjusting our tuition to close those funding gaps. This directly impacts students and their families.

Systemic issues with public higher education financing do exist, but the Governor's budget recommendation goes a long way in addressing what has historically left the legislature with the impossible task of finding the necessary funding to support our public colleges and universities.

The increases proposed in the Governor's spending plan will help the State Universities offer tuition stabilization to our students. This plan incentivizes on-time degree completion, gives students and families an opportunity to better plan for the cost of a post-secondary degree, supports our students and institutions through financial investment, and allows us to continue to offer high-quality academic programs. We believe this plan to be smart public policy that will make a real difference in the lives of the 45,000 students we educate annually, and their families.

While these proposed investments are directed to public higher education institutions, they are also investments in our Massachusetts economy. As you know, Massachusetts has an "education economy" whose strength and health is critically dependent on an educated citizenry.

At MassArt, we believe that an art and design education plays a critical role in creating that educated citizenry and that every problem, big and small, would be better solved if we called for artistic,

creative interventions that incorporate design thinking. We would have better, more inclusive outcomes with an artist, designer, a maker at every table – from climate, to culture, to social justice.

Our Massachusetts business community also demands an educated workforce, and it is our public institutions of higher education that educate a large part of our workforce. This investment in our state's public higher education system is critical to ensure we can continue to offer high quality, meaningful, and affordable post-secondary degree pathways to Massachusetts residents.

Last, I would be remiss if I didn't mention our extraordinary workforce. The past three years have been some of the most challenging years imaginable. My colleagues and I cannot thank our faculty and staff enough for their belief in and continued commitment to our students and to our universities.

Unfortunately, the value of our public sector workforce wages have declined dramatically. Annual cost of living increases have not kept pace with the rate of inflation, putting tremendous financial stress on our workforce.

Across the system we are finding it difficult to recruit and retain the high quality and diverse workforce that our students deserve and demand. Our public higher education institutions are among the best in the country, and our Council of Presidents requests that the Commonwealth invest in our workforce with a cost-of-living adjustment that actually reflects the inflationary factors that they face.

Later this month, our state universities will enter contract negotiations with our system bargaining units on new labor contracts. We encourage the state to recognize the value of our workforce by issuing financial parameters that invest in our committed, talented, and expert employees.

Historically, the state has used a methodology for funding labor contracts that covers only a portion of the salary and benefits included in the collective bargaining agreement. We ask our state leaders to work with us to ensure that contractual increases are fully funded.

I will close with a couple of comments about the passage of the Fair Share Constitutional Amendment ballot question, which anticipates that around \$1.3 to \$1.7 billion in additional tax revenues will be

generated annually. The ballot initiative, and the voters who ultimately agreed with the ballot question, clearly directed this new funding for public education, including public colleges and universities, and transportation.

Public higher education is prepared to make its case for proportional allocation of these funds by demonstrating how system and institutional-level priorities align with our students' and state needs, and how those will be addressed with additional investments.

The State Universities have identified affordability as our primary objective for the use of incremental Fair Share funding, with additional funding targeted to key initiatives. My colleagues and I look forward to working with all of you to make the most of these new investments to support our students and our campuses.

On behalf of my 9 State University colleagues, I thank you for the opportunity to testify today on Governor Healey's first budget – to voice our enthusiastic support for a budget that proposes historic investment in our public higher education system.

We are grateful for your support and your leadership, and look forward to working together in the coming weeks and months to develop a FY24 state budget that keeps our public higher education institutions accessible and affordable, and treats our world class institutions as an investment, not an expense.

And I invite all of you to visit our campuses and to come help MassArt celebrate 150 years!
