



PHENOM
public higher education network of massachusetts

2019 Higher Ed Talking Points

(1) Pass the Cherish Act to #FundOurFuture

Huge cuts to state funding are making it impossible for students and families to afford college.

The state has cut funding by nearly \$600 million dollars since 2001, while the number of students has grown substantially, amounting to an over 33% per student cut. In dollar amounts, the state provides \$3,000 less per student per year, and students pay \$4,000 more per year.

The impact of this chronic underfunding is keenly felt by both our students and our dedicated faculty and staff.

1. Policy: Pass the Cherish Act this spring

- Implementing the recommendations of the 2014 Higher Education Finance Commission, resulting in \$574 million in additional funding for public higher education. These new funds must supplement, not supplant, existing funding.
- Establishing a fair and adequate minimum funding level for public higher ed at no less than the FY01 per-student funding level, adjusted for inflation.
- Freezing tuition and fees for five years, as long as the Legislature appropriates the funds required to reach FY01 per-student funding levels in five years.
- **Bill Numbers:** [H. 1214](#), [S. 741](#)

(2) #DebtFreeFuture for Every Student and Family in MA

Before 1987, a student working a minimum-wage job could pay their way through UMass Amherst without any debt. But over the years, state funding has declined significantly.

As a result, Massachusetts public college tuition and fees have skyrocketed and are now among the highest in the country.

Today, the average UMass student graduates with over \$30,000 in student debt, and the average graduate of our state universities leaves with over \$25,000 in student debt.

Even worse, **many students are dropping out of our public colleges because they can't afford high tuition and fees**, so they are burdened with tens of thousands of dollars in debt whether or not they receive a degree.

Student debt can prevent young people from living independently, buying a home, choosing a dream career, and more. It's a major drag on our economy. And the problem disproportionately affects women and people of color, who are more likely to need to borrow to attend college.

Voters of all ages and backgrounds understand that our future as a Commonwealth depends on moving past this student debt crisis. A recent poll found that 82% of Massachusetts voters support creating zero-debt public colleges.

1. Policy: Pass the Debt Free Future Act this year

- *An Act to Guarantee Debt-Free Public Higher Education* would **guarantee free public higher education as a right** for all residents of Massachusetts.
- To be eligible for this program, students must: (a) be a Massachusetts resident or have attained a high school diploma or its equivalent in the commonwealth; (b) be admitted to and enrolled full-time or part-time in a Massachusetts public college or university or other public certificate, vocational, or other adult education program; and (c) maintain a cumulative GPA of 2.0 or above.
- **Bill Numbers:** [H. 1221](#), [S. 744](#)

(3) Fund Public Colleges and Support Campus Workers

1. Policy: Meet the campus budget requests in this year's state budget

- Our public higher education system is educating many more first-generation, adult and lower-income students who need more support when it comes to debt, housing, transportation, affordability and academic success.
- Decades of state funding cuts have led to layoffs, overworked staff, and a lack of necessary support staff for student success and campus maintenance.
- Often, the State Budget provides less than the minimum amount requested by the colleges and universities. That practice must end.

2. Policy: Adjunct Faculty Pay and Benefits Parity, Address Staff Concerns

- Adjunct and non-tenure track faculty are treated unequally on our campuses. Many receive lower pay and lack access to benefits.
- All public higher education workers face unnecessary limits on their access to retirement and health care benefits.
- Lawmakers must support adjunct faculty and all public higher education workers by passing this bill providing equal access to benefits, eliminating the 60-day waiting period for health insurance, and streamlining the contract process.
- **Bill Number:** [S. 1547](#), [H. 2322](#)