

## Testimony for the House Task Force on Higher Education Financing

March 25, 2003  
Roxbury Community College

Patricia V. Markunas  
President, Massachusetts State College Association  
Professor of Psychology, Salem State College

Chairwoman Harkins, Chairwoman St. Fleur and members of the Committee, for the record my name is Patricia Markunas. I am the president of the Massachusetts State College Association. We represent over 2000 faculty and librarians at the nine state colleges. I appreciate the opportunity to address you today on the very important issue of financing for public higher education in the state.

There can be no doubt as to the seriousness of the financial crisis in Massachusetts. There can also be no doubt as to its cause: a decade of tax cuts for individuals and corporations has cost us billions of dollars in lost revenue. At the Ways & Means hearings on March 10<sup>th</sup> at Bridgewater State College, Representative David Flynn cited **45 separate tax cuts** that have cost the state **\$4,000,000,000** a year.

Let's repeat those figures. Forty-five tax cuts over ten years. \$4,000,000,000. Just think about it. Four billion dollars would mean that the state could meet its obligations and put away one billion dollars in the rainy day fund this year alone.

On March 7<sup>th</sup>, the MSCA Board of Directors voted unanimously to support the restoration of state revenues through the closing of corporate tax loopholes and an increase in the state income tax rate. Financing for public higher education must include restoration of state revenues.

Over the same decade, legislative support for public higher education was excellent. It took ten years of strong budgets to make up for the damage caused to the public higher education system during the state's fiscal crisis of the late 1980s. Please note that I have said "make up for" – not, "move ahead," not "make significant improvements." "Make up for."

Over the past two years, that recovery has been wiped out. Despite the national effects of September 11<sup>th</sup>, the war on terrorism and the economic recession, the 50 states combined have **increased** state appropriations for public higher education by **4.7%** over the past two years. Over the same time, Massachusetts, affected by the same national events and recession, has **decreased** state appropriations for higher education by **8.2%**, putting us 47<sup>th</sup> in the nation in support to public higher education. These figures from the December 13 issue of the *Chronicle of Higher Education* do not include this year's reversions from higher education accounts.

Plummeting state appropriations have caused real damage. This is not about cutting fat or frills; this is about serious reductions to basic educational services: classes, academic support and library services and materials.

The loss of full-time faculty and librarian positions over the past two years has resulted in massive course cancellations and dramatically increased class sizes and academic advising loads. The impact on students is significant. Students may not be able to get into the majors they desire, thereby delaying graduation. Courses needed for graduation are less likely to be offered every semester, thereby delaying progress toward graduation. Faculty with overcrowded classes report that student attrition is much, much greater than in courses with reasonable enrollments. When students drop out of overcrowded classes, progress towards graduation is delayed again.

The concern for holding the line on student tuition and fees is commendable. But understand that locally controlled fee increases assessed to provide classes, advisors, materials, and library services needed by students are **less expensive** in the long run than the additional year or two of college enrollment needed to make up for non-available majors, cancelled courses, and attrition from overenrolled courses.

I turn now to the so-called “Best Demonstrated Practices” contained in the Bain Reports on public higher education. It would have been more honest to entitle these reports “**Cheapest Demonstrated Practices.**” One hundred million dollars of cuts to public safety, academic support, libraries, institutional support, and student services are recommended, **without a single dollar** of that going towards the academic programs of the colleges. No consideration whatsoever was given to the **quality** of the services offered, the needs of the students served or the truly “best practices” of any institution studied. The Bain Report relies on a lowest common denominator formula to define its “savings targets.” It is a formula to provide only the cheapest college education for our citizens without any concern for quality or mission.

The concern for affordability is commendable. Affordability without quality is affording nothing. The concern for access is commendable. Access without quality is access to nothing.

Nowhere in the Bain Reports is there any analysis of the increased costs of the Governor’s reorganization proposals. Regionalization will cost money. Consolidation of institutions will cost money. The break up of the university system will cost money. More bureaucracy in the higher education system will cost money.

Lastly, members of the Committee, the Massachusetts State College Association is unanimously and unequivocally opposed to the privatization of two outstanding state colleges: the Massachusetts College of Art and the Massachusetts Maritime Academy. These institutions, though different in mission and structure, share important characteristics. They have the most rigorous admissions standards and best qualified students in the state college system. They graduate students at the highest rates in the system, who then achieve great economic and professional success. And they provide a specialized and rigorous education to Massachusetts residents that is unaffordable or nonexistent in the private sector. Access, quality and affordability are exemplified at Mass Art and Mass Maritime. Let us strengthen state support for these institutions, not withdraw it.

Thank you for your attention this afternoon.

