

Joint Committee on Higher Education

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Testimony on H1185

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Chairmen Murphy and O'Leary, and through you, members of the Joint Committee on Higher Education, my name is Patricia Markunas and I am the president of the Massachusetts State College Association. We represent nearly 3000 faculty and librarians at the nine state college campuses. Thank you for this opportunity to present testimony concerning H1185, a bill relative to higher education institutions.

The bill before the Committee today would allow the board of trustees of any public higher education institution to designate the institution as a university if that institution met the Carnegie Foundation classification for university status. This issue is not a new one among the Commonwealth's state colleges. Nearly 20 years ago, I was honored to serve on a special consulting group to the state college Council of Presidents to address this question, in light of the release of the Saxon Report that led to the creation of the University of Massachusetts system.

At that time, several state college systems that had their roots in the 19th century normal school movement and the 20th century state teachers college movement had changed their status to state university systems. In some instances, these systems became part of the state's research university system, but in other cases, the system remained separate. Other states continued to maintain a state college system. Our consulting group's recommendation was to continue as a state college system with more authority vested in the local boards of trustees and a coordinating function given to the Board of Regents, a predecessor to the Board of Higher Education.

Since that time, the great majority of states have changed the designation of their state college system to state universities. Few state college systems remain nationwide. This bill would allow the individual state colleges in Massachusetts to change their designation to a state university by vote of the local Board of Trustees.

As president of the MSCA, I held an extensive discussion about H1185 among all members of our Board of Directors at its most recent meeting. The strong consensus was that the MSCA Board would consider the merits of H1185 if and only if an amendment were included that preserves the existing collective bargaining units and a centralized statutory employer for all nine state colleges, regardless of their designation under this bill.

I am happy to report that the attorney for the Council of Presidents and our MTA consultant were able to work together to propose the language found in the last paragraph of the revised draft of H1185. I strongly urge members of the Committee to accept this language to insure the continuation of the state college collective bargaining units and a centralized employer of record. Thank you for your consideration of my testimony and our position on H1185.

