

MSCA – Delegate Assembly 2020
Vice President Report
Interim VP: Maria Hegbloom

AY 2019-2020 has been significant in term of legislative actions for MSCA and MTA. The following highlights some of the bills and actions that our union has been supporting and that support our members.

Janus and the Freedom to Join Bill

In response to the Janus decision, public sector unions in Massachusetts introduced the Freedom to Join Bill (H3854) which was signed into law earlier this year. The bill was meant to mitigate some of the worst effects of the Janus ruling. Among the most significant parts of this legislation is the requirement of employers to provide information about new hires within 10 days of a contract being signed. This includes emails and addresses so that the union can reach out to potential members immediately. Also included is a protection of this information from third-party (and potentially anti-union) organizations. In the coming years it will be important for our chapters and our statewide office to access this information for member and organizing purposes.

Fund our Future: The Cherish Act

A primary legislative goal for the MTA has been to address the decades-long dwindling funding for public higher education in Massachusetts. The Cherish Act is the Higher Ed bill that would restore funding for our public colleges and universities to 2001 levels, bringing in \$600 million over 5 years.

This year was focused on seeking the 1st year of this funding in the FY 21 budget. This meant asking for:

- \$120 million additional dollars toward public higher education
 - MassGrant Plus – financial aid for neediest students (\$20 million)
 - Debt-free future for educators – higher ed debt relief for new K-12 educators (MA public higher ed graduates) who take positions in needy districts in the state; important diversity initiative (6\$ million)
 - Adjunct Health Insurance – S1547/H2322 (\$13 million)
 - Adjunct Pay Equity
 - Capital Debt – (\$15 million) – savings must be invested in hiring full-time faculty/librarians/staff & student success initiatives
 - Campus Funding - \$64 million – operating costs – fully meeting each universities request

Our MSCA members joined this campaign in fighting for increased funding in a number of ways.

- Joint Committee on Higher Education Campus visits – members from the joint committee on higher education visited the nine state universities and were met by MSCA members advocating for increased funding to our institutions. They shared powerful stories about our students’ debt, the plight of adjunct faculty, and our crumbling infrastructure.
- Public Higher Education Advocacy Day – On March 2nd MSCA members from across the state joined over 300 other public higher education students, faculty, and staff to advocate for the public colleges and universities that we all deserve.
- Forums & events with students, organized by MSCA chapters have been held on a number of campuses to bring attention to the lack of funding and need for the state to pick up its fair share.

The Cherish Act bills (S741, H1241) were scheduled to be heard in the Joint Committee on Higher Education at 10:00am on April 30th. However due to the Coronavirus, these hearings have been postponed and are expected to be rescheduled in July or August.

Fair Workplaces, Part-Time Faculty Benefits

Another important area for legislative action has been on the continued fight for part-time faculty health insurance and equity. For several years now the MSCA and MTA have been pushing for legislation that would provide access to health insurance for our part-time faculty. This fight continued the past legislative session with the introduction of an omnibus bill, An Act for Fair Public Higher Ed Workplaces (S1547, H2322). This bill would, among other things, provide access to GIC health insurance for part-time faculty.

The bill was passed favorably out of the Public Service Committee.

COVID-19 and Higher Education Funding in Massachusetts

The CARES Act, which was recently signed into law, provides, among other things, a 6 month pause on student loan payments without interest or penalties until September 30th. This moratorium could greatly aid our recent graduates as well as many members who are still struggling to cover the costs of their own education or those of dependents. In addition, the CARES Act also provides an additional \$14 billion in direct aid to colleges and universities during this time. Half of this aid must go to financial aid and it is still unclear exactly when the money will be distributed, but based on the guidelines colleges and universities already have a rough idea of how much they are likely to receive.

The following provides some idea of crisis impact on Massachusetts public higher education and the expected monies from the CARES act.

Impact of CARES Act Funds on Known FY20 Public Higher Education Funding Gap				
Public Higher Education	CARES Act Funding	Less Student Grants	Current FY20 Gap	After CARES Act
UMass System	\$46,018,581	\$23,009,290	\$70,000,000	(\$46,990,710)
State Universities	\$35,952,400	\$17,976,197	\$38,000,000	(\$20,023,803)
Community Colleges	\$51,897,471	\$25,948,731	\$45,000,000	(\$19,051,269)
Total	\$133,868,452	\$66,934,218	\$153,000,000	(\$86,065,782)

Source: U.S. DoE Funding Allocations, April 2020; Self-reported funding gaps from UMass, and state DHE system; MTA table.

Recent Massachusetts legislation has offered a Higher Education Recovery bill, but it has failed to gain much traction. However, there has been some renewed interest around adjunct health insurance. The MTA is seeking to take advantage of the crisis to push through an emergency measure that would provide health coverage to adjuncts.

In relation to FY 21, Massachusetts is projecting an expected revenue shortfall from between \$2-\$6 billion. It is unclear what this will mean for the state expenditure for public higher education, but the following provides some idea of what cuts we have seen during previous economic downturns:

FY2021 State Budget Scenarios for Public Higher Education from Past Recessions		
FY2021 HE Governor's H2	FY02-03 Percent Cut	FY2020 Reduction
\$ 1,322,098,252	-7.1%	(\$93,868,976)
FY2021 HE Governor's H2	FY07-08 Percent Cut	FY2020 Reduction
\$ 1,322,098,252	-11.3%	(\$149,397,102)
FY2021 HE Governor's H2	FY03-04 Percent Cut	FY2020 Reduction
\$ 1,322,098,252	-14.6%	(\$193,026,345)
FY2021 HE Governor's H2	FY01-04 Percent Cut	FY2020 Reduction
\$ 1,322,098,252	-27.5%	• (\$363,577,019)

Source: MassBudget; calculations by MTA.

The situation is unclear, but what is clear is that the MSCA and MTA need to focus attention on stemming potential cuts to higher education funding and seeking to increase aid to colleges and universities being hit by the COVID crisis.