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Chairs Brady and Gordon, Vice Chairs Feingold and Higgins, and members of the committee:

My name is CJ O'Donnell. I represent approximately 4,000 faculty and librarians at the nine Massachusetts state universities.

On these members' behalf, I urge support for House 2724 and Senate 1733, *An Act to ensure fair public higher education workplaces*.

In particular, Section 1 represents a necessary change to Chapter 150E that would benefit more than 100,000 state employees.

Chapter 150E, the collective bargaining law, was enacted to provide a process for the funding of settled collective bargaining agreements of units representing state employees. Please note, I did not say Chapter 150E represents a "fair" process.

As written, Chapter 150E appears to afford the governor two opportunities to derail the funding of settled collective bargaining agreements; the governor can refuse to submit a funding request and the governor can veto a funding bill after submitting a funding request and passage by the Legislature. Unfortunately, state employees have experience both these scenarios.

What is not included in the law is a practice that has existed for decades whereby the governor sets financial "parameters," effectively predetermining what state employees will receive for wage increases before bargaining really begins. As a result, governors effectively have three opportunities to influence state employee wage increases.

Since governors affect wage negotiations at the start, and have an opportunity to veto funding bills at the end, there is no reason to allow a third opportunity in the middle of the process. Allowing employers to submit the funding request directly to the Legislature would streamline the funding process, and make the process fair.

While supporting the bill in its entirety – including Section 3 that would eliminate the 60-day waiting period for health insurance coverage – I would like to bring attention to the need for the tuition waiver language in Section 4.

In 1984 the Chancellor of the Massachusetts Board of Regents (now the Board of Higher Education) instituted a tuition waiver policy for higher education employees. At the time, it is estimated that the tuition benefit (a common practice for higher education institutions to attract employees) covered roughly 90% of the cost to attend a Massachusetts public college or university. Over the last 35 years student fees have skyrocketed and tuition has been held artificially low, so the benefit now represents roughly 10% of the cost to attend a public college or university in Massachusetts.

I thank you for your attentiveness and look forward to working with the committee to affect the changes sought in House 2724 and Senate 1733.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Christopher J. O'Donnell". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'C' and 'O'.

Christopher J. O'Donnell
President, Massachusetts State College Association