



ACHIEVING HIGH-QUALITY, DEBT-FREE PUBLIC HIGHER EDUCATION FOR ALL

The Fund Our Future campaign for the Cherish Act

The pandemic has dramatically exacerbated the crisis in public higher education. If we don't increase funding for our campuses and provide crucial supports for our students, we risk denying a generation of working-class students and students of color access to public higher education.

Now more than ever, state policymakers need to reinvest in a public higher education system that had already been under-resourced for decades prior to the pandemic. With so many students dropping out of public colleges and universities due to the health and economic impacts of the pandemic — especially students of color and students from low-income

families — we are in danger of weakening our own future. The majority of our public college and university graduates continue to work and live right here in the Commonwealth.

Passage of the *Cherish Act* will provide new opportunities for all of our students — and especially those who are most vulnerable — and mark an important investment in our Commonwealth's economic engine. Supporters of public education are urging lawmakers as they craft the fiscal 2022 budget to include **\$136 million** for public higher education over and above the FY 2021 funding levels, which the first year of the *Cherish Act* would provide.

Our goals for the FY2022 budget:



Make College Affordable



Reinvest in Student Success



Ensure Adjunct Justice

- ⇒ **\$26 million more for MASSGrant Plus** to ensure that the state's lowest-income students can pursue higher education. There is a huge gap between wealthy and working-class students, including students of color, in their ability to afford and complete college.
- ⇒ **\$6 million in debt relief for graduates of Massachusetts public colleges and universities who go to work in the state's public schools.** This program will diversify the teaching profession at a time when districts will be hiring many new educators, thanks to the passage of the *Student Opportunity Act*.

- ⇒ **\$14 million more to invest in student success programs.** This includes supports for low-income students and students of color, using methods that improve the college experience and graduation rates.
- ⇒ **\$70 million increase over FY2021 funding levels for basic operating expenses, allowing all state colleges and universities to freeze tuition and fees.** The governor's budget proposal recklessly reduces FY2021 funding for some campus operating expenses by more than 2 percent.

- ⇒ **\$13 million to provide adjunct faculty with access to health insurance.** Adjunct faculty teach the majority of courses at many of our public colleges and universities, yet they are generally not eligible for employer-sponsored health insurance.
- ⇒ **\$7 million to create pay equity** between full-time and adjunct faculty, in terms of per-course pay.



FUND OUR FUTURE





FULFILLING OUR PROMISE TO THE COMMONWEALTH'S STUDENTS

Fully fund the Student Opportunity Act

In November 2019, students and educators across the Commonwealth celebrated a historic victory with the passage of the *Student Opportunity Act*. This landmark legislation acknowledged that our public schools were deeply underfunded and set a state requirement to fully fund that shortfall by FY2027. Passage of the *SOA* represents the state's promise to address structural racism and the longstanding inequities in educational opportunity that have been sustained by the underfunding of public schools.

Due to financial challenges brought on by COVID-19, the state in its FY2021 budget failed to fund the first year of *SOA* implementation. Unfortunately, the governor's FY2022

budget does not begin the process of getting the state back on track to close the shortfall by FY2027. Our students, particularly low-income students and students of color, have faced unprecedented levels of disruption and challenge over the past year; they quite simply cannot afford to wait any longer for the state to fulfill its promise.

The Commonwealth must fully phase in the *SOA* over the next six years to meet its FY2027 implementation deadline and hold districts harmless for pandemic-related enrollment changes. In FY2022, this means increasing public preK-12 education funding by a total of **\$176.5 million** over the governor's budget recommendation.

Our goals for the FY2022 budget:

\$154 million increase in Chapter 70 funding

Fully fund the *SOA* Chapter 70 increase based on a six-year schedule while holding districts harmless for pandemic-related enrollment changes. Enrollment in public school districts dropped by more than 30,000 students this past fall. The governor used these lower enrollment figures to calculate his FY2022 Chapter 70 recommendation, resulting in \$122 million less than would be provided otherwise. Since many of those students will be back in public schools next fall, the governor's recommendation represents a significant shortfall. Funding will be insufficient to meet the needs of the actual number of students likely to be enrolled in public school districts in the coming year.

\$15 million more for charter school reimbursements

The *SOA* set a three-year schedule for full funding of the charter school reimbursement line item by FY2023. Last year's budget failed to meet this schedule, and the governor's FY2022 recommendation does not get the state on track to full funding according to the original timeline. The state should increase funding for the charter school reimbursement line item to ensure full funding by FY2023.

\$7.5 million in additional funding for the special education circuit breaker program

The *SOA* made out-of-district transportation costs eligible for reimbursement under the special education circuit breaker program and called for full funding of the newly eligible costs by FY2024. The governor's budget fails to adhere to the original schedule agreed to under the *SOA*. The state should get on track to ensure that eligible out-of-district transportation costs are reimbursed on time by FY2024 in accordance with the *SOA*.



FUND OUR FUTURE

