

The Public Higher Education Network of Massachusetts has endorsed several pieces of legislation for this year that are in line with the coalition's principles.

Fund public higher education so it can serve the Commonwealth

Make higher education affordable

Make higher education accessible to all

Hire more teachers, researchers, and staff

Honor and expand democratic institutions of governance

Passage of the following package of bills would take us a long way toward the higher education system that Massachusetts deserves and needs.

1. An Act for a Program of Capital Improvements to the Public Higher Education System in the Commonwealth (S. 739)

This bill will allow the state to borrow three billion dollars for badly needed repairs and construction on all our campuses. There is a desperate need for this, since many facilities were built a half century ago. Many campuses have been forced to divert operating funds needed to teach students into building repair and replacement. Passage of this bill would help reverse the trends of escalating fees and insufficient hiring.

2. An Act Relative to Financial Aid (The Commonwealth Covenant) (S. 736)

This bill would establish a loan forgiveness program such that students who meet certain criteria would not have to repay designated portions of their loans – e.g. if they stay in Massachusetts and major in science, technology, math or engineering. This, together with increases in the financial aid portion of the budget, would be significant steps toward making public higher education more affordable for Massachusetts residents.

3. An Act Supporting Access and Excellence in Public Higher Education (S. 732, H. 1188)

These bills would implement various recommendations of the 2005 Senate Task Force on Higher Education, most notably closing the \$400 million funding gap over the next 7 years to fully fund all the campuses. Besides providing a badly needed infusion of funds for all the campuses, each bill contains provisions that would slow the increase in tuition and fees.

4. An Act Relative to the Production and Pricing of College Textbooks (H. 1200)

This bill would address the exorbitant costs of textbooks by requiring publishers to “unbundle” textbooks from associated products such as CD-ROMs and workbooks. By allowing students to purchase only what they need and providing greater transparency of pricing information, a significant cost saving for students would occur (with no cost to the state).

5. Adjunct Faculty Health Insurance Legislation

There are thousands of adjunct faculty members at our colleges, many of whom teach at more than one campus. Their numbers are steadily increasing, and several hundred of them are without health insurance. This legislation would provide health insurance to adjunct faculty teaching four or more courses per year in the public higher education system in the state, providing increased stability and fairness to a large and growing sector of our workforce.

6. An Act to Promote Educational Parity within Institutions of Higher Learning (H. 1197)

A small number of students who have attended and graduated from Massachusetts high schools are denied in-state tuition rates at public colleges. This legislation would eliminate this disparity for those who are not yet citizens or permanent residents but who would sign an affidavit pledging to apply for such status at the earliest possible opportunity.