



H.639

An Act investing in public higher education

Bill Summary

Lead Sponsor: Rep. Paul Mark (D-Peru) | Sen. Eileen Donoghue (D-Lowell)

This bill makes much-needed investments in public higher education, which has seen its funding reduced by 14 percent since FY 2001, according to a recent Massachusetts Budget and Policy Center report.

This bill helps students and faculty.

This bill makes public higher education more affordable for Massachusetts families.

- Creates a Finish Line Grant program that will pay for one year of tuition and fees, other than the first year, for Massachusetts residents.
- Sets eligibility at 175 percent of state median family income, or roughly \$125,000.

This bill increases student access to tenure-track faculty.

- Creates a fund and mechanism for increasing the number of tenure-track faculty on public college and university campuses.
- Gives current adjunct faculty notice and priority consideration for these new full-time positions.
- Increases students' ability to interact with teaching faculty outside of the classroom.

This bill promotes workplace fairness.

- Provides access to health insurance and state pension options for adjunct faculty who are teaching the equivalent of .5 time or more across all campuses.
- Requires per-course pay parity for adjunct faculty.
- Establishes a minimum 1% state contribution to the mandatory SMART Plan retirement account for faculty who work less than part time.

MTA Division of Government Relations

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Background

This bill addresses a number of serious concerns facing our public higher education system, all of which are primarily the result of state funding cuts to higher education of about 14 percent since FY 2001 when adjusted for inflation. (See Massachusetts Budget and Policy Center, *In 16 Charts: Higher Education Funding in Massachusetts*, Dec. 13, 2016)

- Students and their families face substantially increased tuition and fees across all of our campuses, primarily as a result of state funding cuts. Since FY01, the student share of higher education costs has risen from about one-third to 55 percent at community colleges, 56 percent at UMass campuses and up to 61 percent at state universities. (See Mass Budget report above.)
- State funding cuts have also affected scholarship funding, which has been cut by 31 percent since FY01. The sharp increase in tuition and fees and the drop in scholarship funding have resulted in an increase in student loan debt, which rose 55 percent since 2001. (See Mass Budget report above.)
- Simultaneously, funding cuts have reduced student access to full-time faculty. The number of part-time adjunct faculty, particularly in our community colleges, has increased substantially, while the number of full-time, tenured or tenure-track faculty has not increased comparably. In the community college system, for example, only about 30 percent of credit courses are taught by full-time faculty. (See Massachusetts Teachers Association, *Reverse the Course: Changing Staffing and Funding Policies at Massachusetts Community Colleges*, July 2013)
- Adjunct faculty members, especially those at community colleges, often teach at several campuses each semester. They are paid on a per-course basis, at a much lower rate than full-time faculty. They are not eligible for employer-provided health insurance or pension benefits. Many lack the most basic resources for their work, including office space, computer access and instructional materials. Despite their education and experience, these “contingent faculty” are some of our lowest-paid public employees.
- On the other hand, full-time, tenured or tenure-track faculty generally teach a set number of courses per semester and are usually required to hold regular office hours, advise students and participate in campus activities. They are provided with office space, computer access, and administrative and instructional resources. Students benefit from the additional services full-time faculty are able to provide, and full-time faculty benefit from being able to make a living wage with benefits.

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