

State Universities BHE Segmental Report
March 22, 2022

Good Morning, Chairman Gabrieli, Mr. Moreau, Commissioner Santiago and members of the Board of Higher Education. On behalf of the State Universities Council of Presidents, thank you for this opportunity to provide you with an update on the Massachusetts State University System.

I begin my remarks this morning on a somber note, recalling the lives of four US Marines who were killed last weekend in Norway on a training mission. Among the four was Captain Ross Reynolds, a 2017 graduate of Worcester State University. Our thoughts are with the family of Captain Reynolds and with our colleagues and friends at Worcester State. I have learned that Captain Reynolds was a very effective student leader, a great friend, and an inquisitive young scholar. Ross clearly enriched the lives of those around him, and Worcester State is better place for having had him as a student.

I know this Board has other important agenda items to discuss this morning and so I intend to be brief.

Spring 2022 System Updates

This spring semester, the State Universities of Massachusetts continued our full return to in-person classes, on-campus housing and athletics that we implemented last fall. My colleagues and I continue to be grateful for the cooperation we have received from our campus communities over the last two years as we worked together to minimize the impact of COVID at our institutions. Thanks to our high vaccination and booster rates and our adherence to highly effective health and safety protocols, we are successfully returning to pre-pandemic campus life while maintaining positivity rates at 1% or lower.

As higher education leaders across the state and country transition from pandemic management to endemic planning, our campuses have been evaluating the efficacy of our COVID health and safety protocols. Throughout the remaining 2 months of the spring semester, our campuses will continue to utilize many of the best practices that we know have been successful in protecting the health of our campus and host communities.

Our campuses will continue to provide surveillance testing at no cost to our students and employees throughout the spring semester. We also will continue to follow quarantine and isolation protocols that are based on the public health guidance provided by the CDC and Massachusetts DPH.

And based on the latest CDC guidance, public health data and input from our campus communities, most of our campuses are in the process of lifting mask requirements in most campus public spaces. During this transition, we will continue to encourage our campus communities to follow public health guidance based on their individual risk levels and to be respectful of each other's choices around mask-wearing.

FY 23 and Supplemental Budget Update

As I stated in my remarks from last month, the Council of Presidents continues to advocate to ensure that the legislature funds our three-year labor contracts.

We are grateful that the supplemental budget that passed the House of Representative two weeks ago included funding for the retroactive payments for the incremental salary increases in the collective bargaining agreements as well as funding for our unit members 1.5% COVID bonuses. The Council of Presidents will continue to advocate with the Senate for this legislation to be taken up as expeditiously as possible. We are also grateful to our colleagues for continuing to do what they do so well, serving our students, despite having fairly negotiated salary increases but having not yet been paid those increases.

Good News Stories:

Despite the pandemic headlines these days, there are in fact many good news stories from your state universities. Among them:

Recently, *The Chronicle of Higher Education* recognized **Framingham State University** among institutions that produced the most Fulbright U.S. Scholars in 2021-2022. The Fulbright Program is the U.S. government's flagship international educational exchange program.

Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts has received a \$100,000 Skills Capital Grant from the Massachusetts Executive Office of Education to support the update of the College's Hardware and Robotics Lab, operated by the MCLA Computer Science department. These updates will provide opportunities for students to gain hands-on learning experience in network security, network administration, and software development.

Last week, **Bridgewater State University** announced \$2 million in Congressionally Directed Spending (CDS) for a new virtual cybersecurity training simulator project. Along with state funding, the project – which will be used by BSU students pursuing a degree, minor, or certificate in cybersecurity – seeks to strengthen the commonwealth's resilience in fighting cyberattacks.

At **Salem State University** the big news is DCAMM's release of the Request for Proposals (RFP) to sell South Campus (23 acres) and utilize the proceeds to upgrade and consolidate facilities on main campus while also eliminating tens of millions of dollars of deferred maintenance. Just last week, over twenty interested developers toured the site.

And among all of the State Universities, we continue to move toward post-pandemic operations and we look forward to celebrating the Class of 2022 with in-person commencement ceremonies at the close of the spring semester.

I will close my remarks by again thanking Commissioner Santiago for his leadership and collegueship over his tenure as Commissioner. Carlos, thank you for not only your service to Massachusetts higher education and advancing the work of the Commonwealth's strategic plan to achieve racial equity in higher education, but also for your 40+ year career of service and leadership to American Higher Education.

Chair Gabrieli, as I said last month during my remarks, finding a successor who is equal to Commissioner Santiago will be no small accomplishment. My colleagues in the State Universities and I want to thank you for actively reaching out and meeting with us last month to discuss the formation of a search committee to share the qualities, values and qualifications we would like to see in the next commissioner. We appreciate your willingness to seek our input and advice, and

for your commitment to work with us through the process of selecting a new Commissioner of Public Higher Education

Thank you for the opportunity to share this update from your state universities. We look forward to continuing to work with all of you in the upcoming year in order to advance our mission of delivering high-quality, accessible and affordable post-secondary educational opportunities to our students. Thank you.