

COP Remarks on Behalf of the State University System to the Board of Higher Education  
April 7, 2020

Chairman Gabrieli, Secretary Peyser, Commissioner Santiago and members of the Board of Higher Education, on behalf of the State Universities Council of Presidents, thank you for the opportunity to provide an update on the Massachusetts State University System.

I would also like to thank the Department of Higher Education, the Executive Office of Education, and this board for the constant communication with the state universities during this pandemic. The DHE staff has worked closely with us and have been extraordinarily responsive to the needs of our campuses.

I'd like to share with you the work we have done to prepare for the COVID-19 crisis while maintaining our commitment to the mission of delivering high-quality academic programs; how the campuses are collaborating with MEMA, DPH, and local health care institutions; and our deep concern for the financial viability of the institutions that we help lead.

Over the past eight weeks, the nine state university campuses have worked collaboratively to prepare and respond to the COVID-19 crisis.

- Our campuses worked to transition nearly all of our courses onto distance learning platforms, in a way that preserves academic integrity. The presidents report a spirit of cooperation and collaboration from the campus faculty, who have begun to deliver their classes remotely.
- All of our state university campuses have vacated on-campus housing. The vast majority of our resident students have moved-out of the residence halls; however, we are providing safe on-campus accommodations to a small number of students with uncertain living situations or to those that have nowhere else to go. Our dining services have been suspended with the exception of limited food service for those students whom we continue to house on campus.
- Recognizing that the financial impact of this crisis is causing financial hardship for many of our students and their families, our campuses have made the decision to refund students for prepaid charges related to housing, dining and parking. The total cost of this reimbursement to our students is \$46.8m. It is important to note that our priority has been to preserve the academic integrity of the semester and ensure all programs meet academic requirements for graduation. Therefore, because we were successful in this goal, tuition and other academic charges will not be abated; only student charges related to prepaid room, board and parking are being refunded.
- All our campuses remain open for business, however, well over 90% of our workforce are performing their duties remotely. We are proud to report that our universities were early adopters of the governor's initial call for telework, swiftly turning a mostly in-office workforce into a telecommuting one. Only employees critical to the operation of the institutions are reporting for duty, but all are following state guidance and orders relative

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to safe social distancing.

- University events and conferences have been canceled and academic year-end ceremonies, including commencements, are being postponed or switched to virtual formats. All in-person meetings have been cancelled, postponed or moved virtual.
- We are also continuing the important work associated with a new academic year by recruiting and enrolling students for both summer sessions and for Fall 2020. We have moved traditional on-campus events, like accepted student days, to virtual platforms. Campuses are working with state and local k-12 officials in an effort to accommodate our state's graduating seniors, ensuring this unprecedented disruption does not interfere with their admission to our universities.
- We are proud that our state universities are working on many levels to combat this virus by partnering with state and local healthcare entities to prepare for the expected medical surge. Several of our campuses are already working to support state and local health care agencies and all other campuses are either in the process or are standing ready to help in the effort to combat COVID-19.

On behalf of my colleagues, I'd like to thank our segmental representative, Paul Mattera, for his work and leadership during this crisis. Our presidents and the campuses we lead, endorse Mr. Mattera's resolution urging this board to support the decision of our public higher education campuses to refund students for prepaid room, board, and parking charges that we could not deliver. We further support the resolution by urging budget writes to appropriate funds to the campuses through CARES Act funding, or other means, in order to support these student refunds and strongly encourage the adoption of this resolution today.

We are aware that the economic cost of this crisis is secondary to the immediate medical needs and safeguarding of the health and wellbeing of our citizenry, however, we are compelled to inform you of the financial risk facing our campuses. We ask for your help and advocacy as the state works to distribute discretionary federal CARES Act funds and to help ensure that the mission of our state's public higher education institutions is protected during this crisis.

I'd like to close my comments today by highlighting an example of the thousands of state university alumni helping with this crisis. This week is National Public Health Week (April 6-12) and the Worcester City Manager recognized a city public health employee, Alissa Errede, for her work during this crisis. Alissa is the Chief of Emergency Preparedness for the Division of Public Health in Worcester. She is a double state university graduate of both Worcester State University and Massachusetts Maritime Academy. Alissa is leading the region 2 Health and Medical Coordinating Coalition, which serves all 74 boards of health in the county and 11 central Massachusetts hospitals. Ms. Errede is one of the 10,000 state university graduates that we prepare every year who make our Commonwealth great and will help us through these most difficult times. Thank you.