



**Remarks of Mayor Martin J. Walsh  
Joint Committee on Higher Education, Massachusetts General Court  
July 23, 2019**

*As prepared for delivery*

Good morning: Chairwoman **[Anne] Gobi**, Chairman **[Jeffrey] Roy**, and members of the Committee. My name is Martin J. Walsh, Mayor of Boston. I am here to testify in support of H.1245, An Act Establishing Tuition Free Community College in Massachusetts, sponsored by Representative **Chynah Tyler**. And I am excited to talk about its success in Boston, and why it should be implemented statewide.

Here in Boston, we announced the Tuition-Free Community College Plan in April of 2016. This plan is funded by the Office of Workforce Development and the Neighborhood Jobs Trust. It represents a successful public-private partnership that exists across the Commonwealth, where we are coming together to provide college access to our young people. And it represents our ability to leverage our city's growth to create programs that benefit our residents.

Our Tuition Free Community College program offers free tuition, mandatory fees and school-related expenses to students who qualify and attend some of our city and region's great schools: Bunker Hill Community College, MassBay Community College, Roxbury Community College, and most recently, The Benjamin Franklin Institute of Technology.

We know this program works. Since 2016, we've enrolled over 300 students. 90 percent of these students have graduated from a BPS school. Nearly 85 percent of the students identify as African-American or Latino. It's giving critical opportunities to students who otherwise wouldn't have them. And it's not only helping students enroll and pay for college, but also stay on this path to success.

All of us in this room know: the single most important thing a student can do to ensure a strong future is to earn a degree, or maybe a post-secondary credential. But with the costs increasing every year, it's getting harder for families to afford a college education. In the Boston program, the average family income of participating students is roughly \$26,000.

At the same time, the need for education beyond high school is growing, to access good paying jobs. Massachusetts residents with an associate's degree earn more than \$10,000 a year more than those with only a high school diploma. And that gap is only getting wider. That's why we must find new and creative ways to improve college retention and completion rates in our state, especially for low-income and first-generation college

students. Higher education is one of the most powerful tools we have to break down barriers and move people upwards into the middle class.

Massachusetts is a state that takes great pride in being a leader in education and supporting our young people's success. That's why it's important we take this initiative statewide. We must keep working to make college more accessible and affordable for everyone. Opening more doors for education and opportunities will change the lives of residents and families. It will make our entire Commonwealth stronger.

That's why I respectfully ask you to recommend passage of this bill. I welcome conversation on how to best achieve our goal of expanding this initiative statewide. And I'm happy to answer any questions you may have. Thank you for providing me with the opportunity to speak today.