

AFT Massachusetts Resolution in Support of High-Quality and Affordable Public Higher Education

WHEREAS, high-quality and affordable public higher education is essential to our Commonwealth, serving as a key driver of our economic vitality, a catalyst for civic participation in our democracy, and a pathway to good jobs and the middle class for thousands of Massachusetts residents; and

WHEREAS, chronic disinvestment in public higher education over the past few decades has made college increasingly unaffordable and unattainable for students in our Commonwealth, threatening the livelihood of residents and the economic competitiveness of our state; and

WHEREAS, state funding for public higher education has declined 20 percent per student between 2001 and 2020*, and to make up for this loss of state funding, tuition and fees at the state's public colleges and universities have increased at one of the fastest rates in the nation; and

WHEREAS, these trends have shifted the financial burden for higher education onto families and students, particularly for low-income students and students of color, who are often forced to work longer hours while in college and/or take out larger amounts of student loans, two factors that exacerbate existing economic and racial disparities; and

WHEREAS, students who earn a bachelor's degree at a Massachusetts public higher education institution now graduate with an average debt load of nearly \$33,000, contributing to Massachusetts having the fifth highest average student debt burden in the nation; and

WHEREAS, with higher education becoming increasingly unattainable, growing numbers of would-be college students are opting out of higher education altogether, with enrollment rates shrinking across all state public colleges and universities, particularly among Black and Latinx students, reinforcing economic and racial inequities; and

WHEREAS, in a shortsighted effort to cut costs, full-time tenured faculty members are being replaced by exploited part-time adjunct instructors who are paid much less, have little to no job security, and often do not receive health insurance coverage, forcing them to teach classes on multiple campuses and hampering their ability to serve and support students; and

WHEREAS, Massachusetts public colleges and universities are suffering from faculty and staff shortages across the board, stemming from low pay and untenable workloads, and diminishing the individualized support and attention that students need and deserve; and

WHEREAS, buildings and facilities at public colleges and universities are crumbling after years of disrepair as campus budgets fail to make up for the state's disinvestment; and

*Data from the Hildreth Institute: [Massachusetts Higher Ed: Underfunded Unaffordable and Unfair](#)

WHEREAS, public higher education in Massachusetts finds itself facing an existential crisis on multiple fronts, a crisis requiring urgent action; and

WHEREAS, with the passage of the Fair Share Amendment, there is substantial new money available to make major investments in public higher education:

RESOLVED, that AFT Massachusetts shall work in concert with coalition allies to create a high-quality and equitable public higher education system in which all students regardless of background can fulfill their dreams without taking on crippling debt; and

RESOLVED, that AFT Massachusetts, in concert with coalition allies, shall continue to advocate for substantial state reinvestment in our public institutions of higher education, with new money used to freeze or lower tuition and fees, increase student (non-loan) aid, expand student support and retention programs, make long-overdue building upgrades, and hire more full-time faculty and staff; and

RESOLVED, that AFT Massachusetts, in concert with coalition allies, shall continue to advocate for long-term, permanent solutions to the public higher education affordability crisis, such as the promising pathways to debt-free public higher education outlined in multiple pending bills, including the Cherish Act and an Act Relative to Debt-Free Higher Education; and

RESOLVED, that AFT Massachusetts, in concert with its higher education locals and coalition allies, shall fight for adjunct justice, including equitable pay, health insurance and retirement benefits, and better working conditions; and

RESOLVED, that AFT Massachusetts shall work with its higher education locals to design and implement internal and external campaigns that build union power and increase community support for reinvestments in public higher education and equitable pay for faculty and staff; and

RESOLVED, that AFT Massachusetts shall work with all its local affiliates to educate members about the importance of high-quality and affordable public higher education, and shall urge members' support for and participation in higher education advocacy campaigns, particularly around the objectives of college affordability, campus reinvestment, and adjunct justice; and

RESOLVED, that AFT Massachusetts shall send a copy of this resolution to all relevant state policymakers, allies, and community groups to signal our union's unwavering commitment to the goals enumerated herein.