



## An Act to ensure safe and healthy public higher education campuses

MTA Legislative Agenda, 2021-2022

**Lead Sponsors:** Sen. Adam Gomez (D-Springfield) | Rep. Liz Miranda (D-Boston)

### To ensure safe and healthy public higher education campuses during the COVID-19 pandemic

Across public higher education, students, faculty and staff have faced unprecedented disruption due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It is critically important for the tens of thousands of students who rely on the public higher education system and for the Commonwealth's economy that all of our campuses return to normal operations. Yet they must only do so *under safe conditions*.

The current variability in COVID-19 preventive measures across UMass, state university and community college campuses do not make a system-wide return to in-person learning and regular campus life possible. Every college and university must have adequate ventilation systems, COVID-19 testing programs, and the personal protective equipment needed to ensure the health and safety of students, faculty and staff. Importantly, given the financial challenges in public higher education created by COVID-19, combined with the state's history of chronically under-resourcing the system, it is essential that the costs of implementing these health and safety improvements do not fall on the campuses. This legislation will address these issues by:

- Establishing new state ventilation requirements that current and future public higher education campus facilities must meet under both normal and pandemic conditions, mandating that campuses conduct assessments of ventilation systems to ensure compliance, and requiring that the state, not the campuses, fund needed repairs and upgrades to ventilation systems.
- Requiring the operation of COVID-19 testing programs for students, faculty and staff at public colleges and universities at no cost to the campuses.
- Ensuring that students, faculty and staff at public colleges and universities have access to personal protective equipment at no cost to the campuses.
- Directing the establishment of health and safety committees on every public campus and encouraging institutions to prioritize health and safety, including pandemic planning.

#### **Passing *An Act to ensure safe and healthy public higher education campuses* means:**

- Making sure that every public campus has adequate ventilation during both normal and pandemic conditions.
- Ensuring access to COVID-19 testing programs and PPE for students, faculty and staff at no cost to public colleges and universities.
- Giving faculty and staff a meaningful voice in ensuring that their campuses are safe and healthy environments.
- Keeping the students, faculty and staff who are currently on our campuses healthy while also creating conditions to allow for increased in-person learning and campus life.

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