

February 21, 2025

Dear Colleagues,

 In light of the shifting higher education landscape, I write to reaffirm my unwavering commitment to the principles of equity, access, and opportunity in higher education across the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Now more than ever, it is essential to ensure that all individuals – regardless of background or circumstance – have support, resources, and pathways to success. Higher education must remain a guiding force for inclusion, excellence, and social and economic mobility, and I remain dedicated to breaking down barriers and empowering the next generation of learners and leaders.

 It is worth reminding ourselves that American higher education has transformed from an exclusive system serving the privileged few, to a broad and diverse network of institutions committed to expanding access and opportunity. The passage of landmark policies such as the Morrill Land-Grant Acts of 1862 and 1890, the G.I. Bill of 1944, and the Higher Education Act of 1965 helped democratize education, making it more accessible for all. Our institutions continue to evolve to ensure inclusivity, recognizing that diverse perspectives enhance learning and benefit society. In many ways, these key policies marked the beginning of the nation's equity movement. Today, colleges and universities serve as engines of economic and social mobility, innovation, and economic growth, empowering individuals from all backgrounds to achieve their aspirations and expand the way they contribute to society. This did not happen by accident. We stand on the shoulders of giants who recognized the need for and fought for expanding access. As Massachusetts Secretary of Education Dr. Patrick Tutwiler reminds us, "This country has long fought for all students to have equal access to a public education. Resting policy on the denial and retelling of history is neither sustainable nor acceptable." I fully agree with this statement.

 The recent Dear Colleague letter threatens the collective progress we've made in higher education and undermines efforts to foster access, broader representation, and equal opportunity. Every resident should have the chance to grow their knowledge and skills, earn more money for themselves and their families, and build the future they seek. As Commissioner of Higher Education, I stand in solidarity with Secretary Tutwiler and this Administration in advancing these fundamental equity principles.

 Rest assured, we will continue collaborating with you, the Massachusetts Attorney General’s Office, and others to advance and defend our principles and continue to protect higher education access and opportunity. Thank you for your partnership.

 In community,

 Noe Ortega

Massachusetts Commissioner of Higher Education --