



# ***CHERISH ACT*** **CAMPAIGN PLAN**

*for the public colleges and universities  
our students and communities deserve*

**FUND OUR  
FUTURE**

***[massteacher.org/highered](https://massteacher.org/highered)***



# OUR RED FOR ED MOMENT CONTINUES. NOW IT'S #REDFORHIGHERED!

MTA members joined the national Red For Ed movement when we engaged in fierce advocacy to win a once-in-a-generation fight that increased funding for public schools by \$1.5 billion and made state spending on preK-12 schools more equitable. We must now turn our energy toward public higher education to ensure that every student who graduates from high school has the opportunity to attend and graduate from a high-quality public college or university without debilitating debt. Higher education is a public good and not a private privilege. Here is how, together, we can win another historic fight for our students.

This spring we will focus on passing the **Cherish Act** (S.741/H.1214) and a program of investments to address affordability, justice for adjunct faculty and staff, restoration of full-time, fully benefited faculty and staff positions, and relief of capital debt. Now is the time to take the necessary steps to benefit the students, faculty and staff at every public higher education campus in Massachusetts.

## HOW ARE WE GOING TO WIN?



The MTA is part of the Fund Our Future coalition, which is made up of groups representing students and their families, educators and civil rights activists. Many of these groups were our partners in defeating Question 2, the 2016 ballot initiative to lift the cap on charter schools. The coalition built the unstoppable movement that resulted in passage of the **Student Opportunity Act** in 2019.

Our coalition can win because the public and ALL of our members are with us in wanting high-quality, debt-free public higher education, because the public holds our public colleges and universities in very high regard, and because we have built significant power through recent victories. We are prepared to go all in with the coalition to win.

## WHO IS STANDING IN OUR WAY?



For too long, the state Legislature has gone along with a national trend of turning a public good into a private privilege, investing less and less in our public colleges and universities and forcing students and families to take on the financial burden of higher education. Funding for public higher education has declined by almost one-third since 2001, harming the programs at our community colleges, state universities and UMass system and hampering accessibility to these public institutions. It is time to end the era of austerity budgets and privatization trends that have weakened the ability of our public higher education system to best meet the needs of the students who rely on access to high-quality, affordable public colleges and universities.

# CAMPAIGN PLAN

## OUR DEMANDS

### #1 Pass the *Cherish Act*

A majority of the Legislature has co-sponsored the *Cherish Act*. When fully enacted over a five-year period, the *Cherish Act* will restore the massive cuts that have been made to our public colleges and universities over the past 20 years. Each year that the Legislature takes a step toward fulfilling the five-year goal, public colleges and universities will agree to freeze tuition and fees. Full funding of the *Cherish Act* would bring in nearly \$600 million to our 29 public colleges and universities.

### #2 Pass Year One Investments of the *Cherish Act*

As we push for passage of the *Cherish Act*, we are also demanding that the current budget include the act's initial installment of \$120 million for public higher education.

- **Debt-Free Future** – Massachusetts needs a public higher education system where *all* students can graduate debt free. This starts with a dramatic expansion of MassGrant Plus to fully support our most financially vulnerable students, and, building on the *Student Opportunity Act*, debt relief to all public college and university graduates who go to work in our public schools, especially in the districts with the greatest need.
- **Adjunct Justice** – As put forward in the adjunct justice bill (*S.1547/H.2322*), secure health insurance and pay parity for our adjunct faculty and staff who educate the majority of our students on many of our public campuses and yet work for low pay, with no health benefits and little job security.
- **Relieve the Burden of Capital Debt** – At one time, the state paid for the construction and maintenance of our campus buildings; now much of the burden for capital improvements falls to the campuses. This shift has led to layoffs, course cancellations and increased class sizes. Every dollar of capital debt the Legislature pays off should go directly back into classroom instruction and educational programs.

## OUR PATH TO VICTORY

**Launch** the People's Budget and Campaign to Pass the *Cherish Act*.

**Educate** parents, community members and educators at every level, from preK to higher ed, about the crisis in public colleges and universities – at Action Forums from January through May on campuses, in schools and in communities across the state.

**Agitate** with letter writing, in-district legislative meetings, social media, a “debtors’ march” to the State House, and other locally developed actions around debt, adjunct justice, the erosion of full-time, benefited faculty and staff positions, sick buildings and the unjust burden of capital debt on campus budgets.

**Show Up** on **March 2 at Public Higher Education Advocacy Day**, joining hundreds of students, legislative leaders and political allies to demand that the Legislature start reinvesting meaningfully in public higher education, as well as at local actions and at the State House on key legislative dates.

## OUR PROGRESS SO FAR

- **Gathered 20,000 signatures** of members, including both preK-12 and higher ed, on petitions voicing support for the *Cherish Act* and the *Promise Act*.
- **Identified more than a million connections** of people interested in education funding efforts via social media during the first phase of the Fund Our Future campaign.
- **Won the support of all 29 presidents and chancellors** of public colleges and universities for the *Cherish Act* and specific types of investments (affordability, adjunct justice, capital debt relief).
- **Held a powerful briefing at the State House**, where our members detailed the impact on students, staff and faculty of the decades-long disinvestment in public higher education.

## UPCOMING ACTIONS

- **Launch of spring campaign** – **Beginning in February**, events organized around state budget deliberations
- **Action Forums on the Crisis in Public Higher Education** – Senate District Coordinators and MTA members will organize in **February, March and April**
- **Public Higher Education Advocacy Day** **March 2**
- **House budget development** – phone banking and letter writing **April 1–15**
- **House budget debate** **April 2–May 1**
- **College Commencements** **May 4–18**
- **Senate Ways and Means Budget** **May 11–18**

## ONGOING ACTIONS

- Member-to-member conversations in preK-12 and higher education locals
- Educational and informational workshops in preK-12 and higher education locals
- Letter writing
- Visibility events tied to **contract actions on campuses**

# MEMBER ENGAGEMENT TIPS

## **The *Cherish Act* is a priority for all of us.**

It's not just a "higher ed issue" because so many MTA members answer "yes" to one or more of the following questions:

### ***ARE YOU CURRENTLY TAKING COURSES AT A PUBLIC COLLEGE OR UNIVERSITY?***

Then the odds are great that you are being taught by a poorly paid adjunct who has no obligation — or time — to meet with you outside of class. Or perhaps the building where your classes take place is in desperate need of repair and updated technology.

### ***DO YOU WORK AT A PUBLIC COLLEGE OR UNIVERSITY?***

Workloads have grown unmanageable for staff at many public campuses. Benefits are spread inequitably across our campuses, and parking fees for some employees have become burdensome salary takeaways. All higher ed locals will be in bargaining this year, with workload and funding issues central to negotiations.

### ***DO YOU WORK WITH HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS SEEKING ADMISSION TO A PUBLIC COLLEGE OR UNIVERSITY?***

Our students need a high-quality public option in their pursuit of higher education. They need access to scholarships and a pathway to a debt-free future. Our public higher education graduates tend to stay in the state, with many becoming educators in our preK-12 schools.

### ***DO YOU HAVE CHILDREN ATTENDING A PUBLIC COLLEGE OR UNIVERSITY WHO ARE WORRIED ABOUT STUDENT DEBT? DO YOU HAVE YOUR OWN STUDENT DEBT?***

MTA members face the same challenges that all working families do, and right now the ability to pay for college is one of the top concerns identified in a survey of all members, both preK-12 and higher ed.

