

Taking the First Step to Achieving High-Quality, Debt-Free Public Higher Education for All **The Fund Our Future Campaign for the *Cherish Act***

The Fund Our Future coalition, with its broad group of allies, achieved a remarkable victory in passing the *Student Opportunity Act*. But education does not stop at high school. We must ensure that all of our students — especially students of color and low-income students — have access to affordable high-quality public higher education. As we push for passage of the *Cherish Act*, we are also urging that the FY21 budget include the additional \$120 million for public higher education that the first year of the bill would provide.

A Debt-Free Future: We propose two steps forward to achieving a truly affordable public higher education system:

- **MassGrant Plus:** We want to support our neediest students, making sure that the MassGrant Plus program covers unmet needs for our lowest-income students. This would cost \$20 million in year one of a five-year rollout period.
- **Debt-Free Future for Educators:** Second, building on the *Student Opportunity Act* and the chance it offers to build a new generation of outstanding and diverse educators, we propose providing debt relief to all public college and university graduates who go to work in our public schools, with a focus on the districts with the greatest need. The districts receiving the largest share of the SOA funds will be hiring up to 1,000 educators in the coming year as they seek to provide the staff — teachers, counselors, paraprofessionals and other Education Support Professionals, librarians and nurses — they have long needed. Creating a program that could relieve the \$30,000 in average student debt over the five years of the *Cherish Act* rollout would cost no more than \$6 million in FY21.

Adjunct Faculty: The decline in per-student spending over the past two decades has brought about the rapid and accelerating use of adjunct faculty at our community colleges. Our adjunct faculty members teach the majority of courses on many of our public campuses and yet work for low pay, generally with no health benefits and little job security.

- **Adjunct Health Insurance:** According to the Board of Higher Education, there are 2,349 adjuncts who teach at least a part-time course load as defined in section 5 of *S.1547/H.2322*. Based on Group Insurance Commission data, the estimated cost of providing health insurance for our adjunct faculty and staff would be about \$13 million.
- **Adjunct Pay Equity:** Currently, adjunct faculty members are paid about \$1,000 less per course than the comparable per-course pay of a full-time faculty member at our community colleges. There are more than 7,000 courses being taught by adjuncts, which would make the cost of providing pay equity for these adjuncts roughly \$7 million.

Relieve the Burden of Capital Debt and Reinvest in Student Success: At one time, the state paid for the construction of our campus buildings; now, much of the burden for capital improvements falls on the campuses. This shift has led to layoffs, course cancellations and increased class sizes. Every dollar of capital debt that the Legislature pays off should be dedicated to student success. We propose that the Legislature relieve existing capital debt by approximately \$15 million with the requirement that the savings be invested in hiring full-time faculty and staff and in other student success programs, including additional supports for low-income students and students of color, using methods that improve the college experience and graduation rates.

Campus Funding: We also urge the Legislature to increase funding for our state college and university operating line items by \$64 million, which would be an amount sufficient to freeze tuition and fees.