FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
October 23, 2019

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Over 200 MA Community College Students Gather at State House to Urge Increased Investment in Community College System

BOSTON – More than 200 Massachusetts community college students, faculty, staff, and presidents gathered at the State House on Wednesday for Community College Student Advocacy Day to meet with members of the Legislature and urge that they support the state’s community college system in providing a better funded, more accessible, high-quality education for its students.

The Massachusetts Community College system serves more than 156,000 students across 15 institutions in all regions of the Commonwealth. The colleges offer wide-ranging programs, workforce training, arts courses, campus athletics, clinics for community members, and much more. A common theme throughout the day was the reality that many community college students face significant non-academic challenges that often get in the way of their educational success such as homelessness, food insecurity, full-time jobs, and the extensive costs of transportation and childcare.

“Today was all about highlighting the individuals who are the most equipped to advocate the importance of investments in the 15 community colleges – the community college students,” said Tom Sannicandro, Director of MACC.

“We’re excited that groups of students from each and every one of our colleges were able to come to the State House and meet directly with their elected officials to discuss the importance of their community college education,” said Dr. Pat Gentile, President of North Shore Community College and Chair of MACC. “This day elevated student voices to discuss the importance of the community colleges and the need for substantial investment in our institutions.”

Hosted by MACC, the event featured a speaking program in the Great Hall that included testimonials of support from community college students, as well as Department of Higher
Education Commissioner Carlos Santiago, Senate Committee on Ways and Means Chair Michael Rodrigues, and co-chairs of the Joint Committee on Higher Education Senator Anne Gobi and Representative Jeffrey Roy. Dr. Gentile served as the MC for the program.

“It’s terrific to see such passionate public advocacy from our community college students, who represent the largest and most diverse sector of our public higher education system,” said Carlos E. Santiago, Commissioner of Higher Education. “These are the students – so many of whom are raising children and working multiple jobs while pursuing their degrees - who represent the future citizenry and workforce in our state. I’m delighted so many took time to share their stories with legislators.”

“Community colleges play a vital role in our Commonwealth, as do their students, and I have always prided myself on being a strong supporter,” said Senator Michael J. Rodrigues (D-Westport). “As Chair of the Senate Committee on Ways and Means I was glad to be able to ensure continued support for these important institutions in the state’s budget.”

“Our students deserve to have their voices heard, and I am glad to have the chance to not only meet with them today but at each of their campuses as well. Their experiences and testimony are valuable resources that we can all benefit in learning from,” said Senator Anne Gobi (D-Spencer).

“It was great to hear from the students and talk with them about what is happening on our community college campuses,” said Rep Jeffrey N. Roy (D-Franklin). “As we have seen during our campus tours, these colleges provide unique learning opportunities and help students prepare for the 21st century’s economy. Maintaining them as strong centers for advancement is important to our commitment to provide opportunities for all.”

The community colleges have an open access mandate, meaning that they accept all who apply, and therefore need to meet students’ various individual needs. Student speakers argued that in order to ensure that all students on every campus receive the same support, a substantial investment in the community college system is critical.

“My personal take away from today's events both during the ceremony and meetings with State Representatives, was that the decision makers agree with the changes that need to be made, and are equal parts eager to participate and actively empathetic,” said David Smith, SGA President at North Shore Community College.

“When we as a state invest in the benefits of community college, I believe we will see improvements in many fields but most importantly, everyone will be given the opportunity to receive a satisfactory, quality education,” said Caleb Fritz, a student at Greenfield Community College.

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