

Higher education:

a position statement from the committee to elect **Barbara Madeloni**

This year brought the largest reinvestment into public higher education in Massachusetts in a generation. The so-called “50-50” formula is an excellent base on which to build a renewed commitment to public higher education. This agreement, which froze fee increases for a year and mandates that the state invest in public higher education an amount at least equal to what students and families contribute when they pay tuition and fees, is a great start. But after years of cuts, we have a long way to go.

My goals for public higher education are grounded in a few key principles.

- ▶- Public higher education serves many purposes, all of which must be supported. It provides opportunities for students to advance knowledge both broadly, in the tradition of the liberal arts, and specifically, in the attainment of specialized skills; it is an incubator of ideas; it is a place to cultivate democratic engagement; it is a center for research; and it supports and grows the general welfare.
- ▶- The benefits of public education to the individual and the Commonwealth are as many as are its purposes. Therefore, discussions of its value must be broad and inclusive. It is the very nature of intellectual work-whether in the classroom, the studio, the study, the field, or the lab- that it challenges what we think we know. Efforts to quantify and monetize the work of faculty, students and staff undermine the questioning and uncertainty that are at the core of intellectual engagement and exert top down pressures that narrow our work.
- ▶- The general welfare of our communities is enhanced by growing the ranks of college graduates. Progressive taxation and re-examination of resource allocations will allow for the Commonwealth to support more students in their pursuit of advanced degrees. The doors of our public colleges and universities must be open to all students, especially students of color and other marginalized groups.
- ▶- We can only gain the public higher education system our citizens and residents deserve if we band together with students and their families. Our interests are ultimately the same: sufficient funding and academic freedom to support quality and accessibility of our public institutions. Only with a unified voice – as happened this past year – will we achieve our goals.

The MTA, under my leadership, will support education workers, students, parents and community members to:

- 1)** End the crushing burden of student debt. Working within the framework of the 50-50 formula, provide the first two years of higher education free to each student in our public institutions. The last two years of college would be paid for by students in a ‘pay-it-forward’ model. That is, students would pay a percentage of income after graduation back to the institution.
 - 2)** Fully fund higher education in order to guarantee that faculty and all education workers be given the resources and freedom to do their work in conditions of dignity and respect, unencumbered by excessive surveillance or demands for resource generation or ‘performance funding.’
 - 3)** Guarantee that all education workers be paid salaries and given benefits – including existing retiree health benefits – that allow them to fully support themselves and their families. Faculty and staff pay and working conditions are student learning conditions. We must end the situation where some MTA members in public higher education do not make a living wage, where some are even below the poverty level.
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