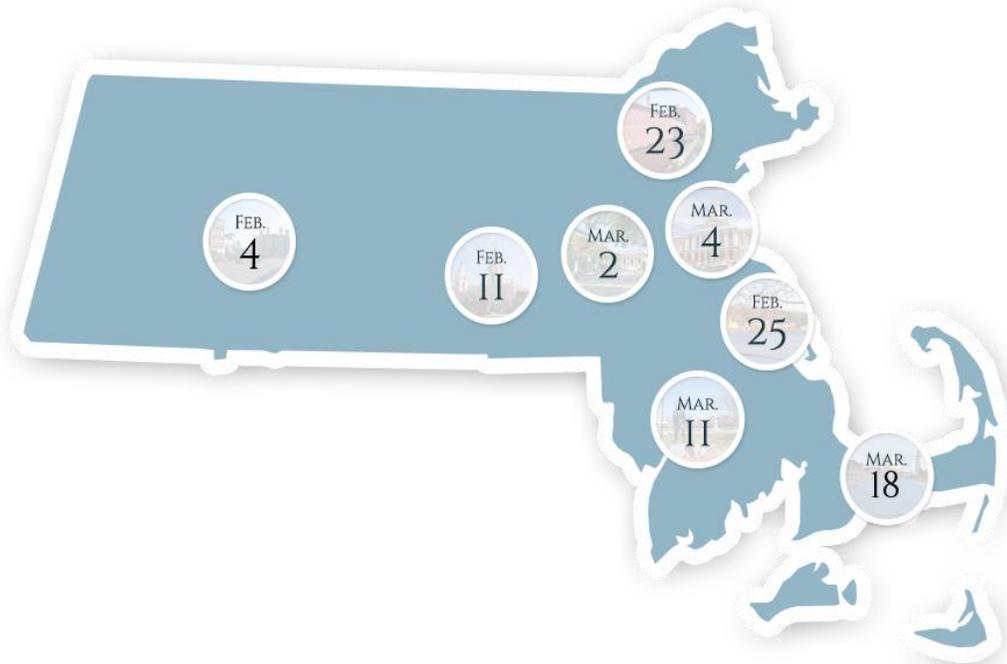




# ***Commonwealth Conversations***

## ***A Report on Our Findings***

***Supporting Healthy Families, Vibrant Communities and a Prosperous Economy***



# **Introduction**

## ***Origin of “Commonwealth Conversations”***

On January 7, 2015, Senator Michael Rodrigues offered an order to the Massachusetts Senate calling for the formation of a special committee of the Senate to conduct regional public forums. It was so ordered and adopted,

*“That members of the Senate shall conduct a series of regional public forums and visits to hear and understand the concerns and priorities of the people of the Commonwealth. The forums and visits shall guide the Senate in setting its priorities to support strong and healthy families, vibrant and sustainable communities and a transparent, efficient and effective state government.”*

## ***Purpose of the Report***

The purpose of this report is to share with you the results of what we, the Massachusetts State Senate, heard during our “Commonwealth Conversations” tour, a series of community visits, regional meetings and public engagement forums that took place across the Commonwealth from early February to mid-March.

Based on a simple premise – engage the people in the process and the process will ignite – we left Beacon Street for Main Street, traveling hundreds of miles, bringing the State House to every corner of our Commonwealth from the Berkshires to Cape Cod. In a collective effort to make state government more accessible, effective, and responsive, we engaged the public and listened to the thousands of people who invested their time and energy to have their voices heard and drive the conversation during the visits, meetings and public forums that were held.

As a result, the people voiced their concerns and priorities on a wide range of diverse issues from addressing income inequality, confronting the opioid epidemic, delivering a world class transportation system, reforming the criminal justice system, ensuring access to high quality educational opportunities, preserving affordable health care, improving workforce development opportunities, securing reliable energy, and many more. Because of the people’s sheer desire to engage, participate, and share invaluable input, we, the Massachusetts State Senate, are already benefitting from their commitment and passion. We will now carry their voices and ideas back to the State House.

The following represents our findings and a series of next steps intended to inform and guide the Massachusetts State Senate in its ongoing efforts to craft a bi-partisan agenda that will work to address the concerns and priorities of all the people of the Commonwealth.

# *Findings and Next Steps*

## *Addressing Income Inequality and Advancing Economic Opportunity*

The issue of addressing income inequality and advancing opportunity was a dominant theme that was reinforced throughout “*Commonwealth Conversations*” by the public during each of the eight public forums.

From Bridgewater to Holyoke, Buzzards Bay to Lawrence, Newton to Worcester, and beyond, the people recommended us, the Massachusetts State Senate, to consider and support number of measures – ranging from a constitutional amendment to establish a graduated income tax to increasing the state’s earned income tax credit to making equal pay for equal work a reality – aimed at advancing opportunity, building a bridge to prosperity, and paving the way to improved economic mobility for hard working, low- and middle-income families.

With families struggling to make ends meet, and the road to prosperity steep, a palpable sense exists among the people that the American dream – the belief that you will get ahead by working hard and playing by the rules – has become a broken promise to many hoping to afford a better life for their children. Making matters more stressful for our Commonwealth’s families and communities, and exacerbated by decades of growing income inequality, it is clear that income growth for low and middle-income households is significantly slower and easily outpaced by higher income households in our state who have dramatically experienced stronger income growth. As a result, our state is faced with stagnant incomes and fraught with a lack of opportunities for individuals, families and businesses to achieve upward mobility. These circumstances threaten to unravel the economic, social, and cultural fabric of our Commonwealth.

During “*Commonwealth Conversations*”, the level of public engagement and passion displayed on the issue of economic opportunity hailed from all walks of life. Rooted in the ideals of fairness and opportunity, their desire for meaningful and measurable progress – to halt growing income inequality, break the cycle of poverty, and foster enduring economic security for all – is a reflection of their collective values and ours as a collaborative, lawmaking body. Moreover, the people’s support for the adoption of a more progressive income tax structure to address income inequality is to be recognized as a reinforcement of these values and as a way to ensure our Commonwealth’s current tax system is more equitable and fair.

***Finding*** – *With growing income inequality challenging the economic well-being of our citizens, and significant disparities in economic opportunity among differing regions and communities within the Commonwealth, we, the Massachusetts State Senate, find that advancing opportunity and ensuring prosperity requires a broad commitment to a forward-looking course of action. Further, we find that any such action must reflect our*

*common values, maintain our high quality of life and grow our economy in ways that create and expand greater economic opportunities benefitting all people across all regions in every corner of the Commonwealth.*

***As next steps, the Senate will work to:***

- 1) Engage academia, employers, community organizations, labor unions, local government officials, residents and others – to outline and implement a stakeholder process to assess and identify achievable policy approaches to addressing growing income inequality, building a competitive business climate, and expanding access to economic opportunity;*
- 2) Increase the state’s earned income tax credit to reward hard working families, and;*
- 3) Advance new policies and improve existing policies designed to break the cycle of poverty, improve economic mobility, and create pathways for individuals and low-income families to reach economic and financial stability.*

### **Confronting the Opioid Addiction Crisis**

We, the Massachusetts State Senate, generally accept and acknowledge that addiction is a disease that does not discriminate when it comes to ethnicity, race or socio-economic background.

During roundtable discussions held in Fall River, Plymouth, Quincy, and Springfield, the message delivered by local government officials, health care providers, law enforcement officials, district attorneys, community coalitions and other stakeholders was loud and clear – the Commonwealth is in the midst of a challenging public health crisis that is prevalent in every corner of our state impacting families and their loved ones without prejudice.

As we engaged and listened to stakeholders throughout “*Commonwealth Conversations*”, the challenges to an effective public health response to the opioid addiction crisis were clearly evident. From a shortage of and limited access to available resources for patients transitioning from critical care to recovery, to the surging cost of emergency anti-overdose treatments like naloxone, and to the evolution of health care payment models and its impact on behavioral health rates, there are considerable challenges before us. However, without concrete action to confront the ongoing crisis, its associated impacts will unfortunately result in the rapid intensification of social and public health costs likely leading to further fatal overdoses.

***Finding*** – Recognizing the challenges and struggles facing individuals endlessly plagued by the scourge of addiction, we, the Massachusetts State Senate, find our Commonwealth in the midst of a challenging opioid addiction crisis that requires a comprehensive and effective public health response focused on prevention, intervention, treatment, and long-term recovery. Further, we find accessibility to a continuum of care is of critical importance to ensuring families and their loved ones in dire need of intervention and treatment have access to a wide spectrum of services without the presence of barriers.

**As next steps, the Senate will work to:**

- 1) Confront the opioid addiction crisis by pursuing cost-effective and evidence-based policy approaches focused on prevention, intervention, treatment, and long-term recovery;
- 2) Improve the quality of and access to behavioral health services, including access to long-term treatment and recovery resources;
- 3) Address the shortage of and invest in resources for patients transitioning from critical care to recovery;
- 4) Review and assess behavioral health provider payment arrangements and payment levels across all payers, and;
- 5) Raise awareness and increase understanding of addiction and substance abuse treatment resources to reduce stigma.

### **A Compassionate Approach to Reforming the Criminal Justice System**

Aligned with the challenges we face in confronting the opioid crisis, a clarion call for reforming the Commonwealth’s criminal justice system resonated throughout “Commonwealth Conversations” and during public meetings and forums held in Lawrence, Lowell, Norwood, Roxbury and Worcester.

Hearing direct testimony from families, individuals entangled with the justice system, community coalition groups, and youth development agencies, the Massachusetts State Senate learned extensively about how our Commonwealth’s current sentencing guidelines pose considerable barriers to individuals hoping to transition back into the community as socially responsible, law-abiding citizens.

As a result, it is clear that the people’s support for comprehensive criminal justice reform is focused on the development of fair sentencing guidelines, improved diversion programs to assist drug offenders in need of treatment, improved reentry programs and a reduction in recidivism rates.

Conversely, however, the public’s call for reform was countered by the direct concerns conveyed to us by local law enforcement officials, district attorneys and other public

safety professionals, who support mandatory minimum sentences as part of an aggressive approach to imprisoning drug dealers. These professionals prioritize the safety and security of the public in any consideration, discussion or development of criminal justice reform.

***Finding*** – *Recognizing the exorbitant costs associated with incarceration, and as an element to our Commonwealth’s strategic response to confronting the opioid addiction crisis, we, the Massachusetts State Senate, find that any consideration for a reform of our criminal justice system requires a measured approach seeking to ensure and improve the availability of public safety resources, reduce prison populations, reinvent how treatment is delivered as an alternative to incarceration and effectively help low-risk, non-violent offenders re-enter back into the community and rebuild their lives as socially responsible, law-abiding citizens.*

***As next steps, the Senate will work to:***

- 1) Pursue a data-driven approach – in alignment with response efforts to confront the opioid crisis - to achieve a sensible and measured reform of our criminal justice system;*
- 2) Improve the resources and tools available to law enforcement;*
- 3) Explore current sentencing guidelines in peer states, implement best practices and advance policies establishing fair and just sentencing guidelines;*
- 4) Reduce recidivism, reduce incarceration rates and improve community reentry programs help low-risk, non-violent offenders transition back into society, and;*
- 5) Reinvest any potential savings from reforms into after-care and long-term substance abuse treatment and recovery programs.*

### ***Delivering a Reliable World Class Transportation System***

“Commonwealth Conversations” happened to unfold during the snowiest winter on record, causing crippling delays and disrupting our day-to-day ability to reliably move people across the state’s public transportation network. The winter of 2015, not only exposed a number of pre-existing weaknesses with our transportation system, it also renewed the people’s desire for and interest in a world class transportation system. Bred, in part, as a reaction to the harsh winter and its impact we collectively felt as hearty New Englanders, it was clear the people seek actionable steps to address the many challenges before us.

As we learned while traveling across the Commonwealth, the transportation challenges of the people living in communities like Braintree, Burlington, Lynn or Roxbury are undeniably different from those living in Greater Barrington, Monson or Weymouth. Although these challenges vary, the message we heard across the state was decidedly the same: they strongly support a reliable, modern, world class transportation system

that enhances our quality of life, improves mobility, enhances access to jobs and opportunity, sustains our state's strong economic foundation, and further advances the Commonwealth as an exceptional place to live, work and raise a family.

***Finding*** – *As a critical component to our Commonwealth's long term economic competitiveness and vitality, we, the Massachusetts State Senate, recognize the distinct transportation needs of each region and find that efforts to modernize our transportation infrastructure and deliver a reliable world class transportation system requires collaborative efforts to mutually benefit all people in every corner of the Commonwealth so all regions share in the contributions to meeting transportation needs and attain benefits from such contributions.*

***As next steps, the Senate will work to:***

- 1) Restore public confidence and reform the way we deliver a reliable world class transportation system as a core public service that the people deserve;*
- 2) Ensure adequate, reliable, and sustainable transportation funding resources, and;*
- 3) Support investments to modernize our transportation infrastructure for future generations, including our rails, roads, bridges, regional transit, bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure.*

### **Preserving Our Environment, Securing Our Energy Future, and Addressing Climate Change**

As ideals necessary to the common good and welfare of our people, preserving our natural environment, protecting clean air and water, conserving our natural resources, securing our energy future, and fighting the impacts of climate change must be recognized as vital priorities for the continued well-being of our Commonwealth.

From Southeastern Massachusetts to Merrimack Valley and from Greater Boston to Western Massachusetts, the public conveyed support for positioning Massachusetts as a renewable energy leader. There were calls for investments in clean energy and environmental preservation, as well as opposition to expanding pipeline capacity through protected public land. As public conversations turned to concerns about the current state of energy and how to achieve a secure and sustainable energy future, additional concerns of how to contain escalating electricity costs that put our Commonwealth at competitive disadvantage and how to deliver reliable power to homes, businesses and schools were expressed at each stop of the tour.

*"Commonwealth Conversations"* not only carried forward the people's expressed support for robust policies to further preserve our environment, but also support for a thoughtful approach to achieving a more diverse and balanced energy portfolio, a

modernized energy infrastructure, and a further reduction in greenhouse gas emissions, while simultaneously addressing rising electricity and energy costs that undermine our Commonwealth's long term economic competitiveness.

***Finding*** – *Recognizing that our Commonwealth's constitution regards conservation of our precious natural resources as a public right, we, the Massachusetts State Senate, find that preserving our environment, protecting our public lands, and fighting climate change is of critical importance to the common good and welfare of the people and further finds any consideration to achieve a secure and sustainable energy future requires a balanced approach that lowers costs, delivers reliable power to all people in every corner of the Commonwealth, and enhances our state's long-term economic competitiveness and vitality.*

***As next steps, the Senate will work to:***

- 1) Preserve the environment, protect public lands, and conserve natural resources as a public right;*
- 2) Encourage the development of a comprehensive energy policy – in coordination with key stakeholders – focused on driving down energy costs and reducing our Commonwealth's carbon footprint by; a) establishing a diverse and balanced energy portfolio, b) modernizing our energy infrastructure, and c) building on recent energy efficiency successes, and;*
- 3) Achieve a secure and sustainable energy future by supporting investments ensure the long-term reliability and stability of how we deliver power across the grid, and;*
- 4) Prepare for the impacts of climate change by exploring and identifying where we are most vulnerable and taking concrete measures to protect the public health, public safety, and the economy.*

### ***Strengthening Pathways to Exceptional Educational Opportunities***

Throughout “*Commonwealth Conversations*”, the Massachusetts Senate engaged with local government leaders, school officials, and teachers, and heard direct testimony from families and students about the current state of education. We applaud the participation of the countless families who generously invested their time and efforts to advocate on behalf of their child's educational well-being, and recognize their commitment to ensuring the presence of accountability in all of our schools.

Our visits to the communities of Braintree, Everett, Holyoke, Melrose, Newton, and Roxbury brought forward support for improved educational opportunities that every child deserves and needs. With the public's interest on issues ranging from universal Pre-K to eliminating barriers to college affordability, from raising the charter school cap to updating the Chapter 70 funding formula, from improving efforts to boost literacy

rates to reviewing unfunded educational mandates placed on communities, the overarching theme of improving and expanding access to educational opportunity in a more equitable manner was undoubtedly on the minds of the people.

***Finding*** – *As a critical component to assuring our Commonwealth’s long term economic competitiveness and vitality, and recognizing the fundamental role public education plays as a building block to a child’s foundation for future success, we, the Massachusetts State Senate, find that future efforts to improve, support, and strengthen pathways to educational opportunity shall mutually benefit all people in every corner of the Commonwealth in an equitable manner.*

***As next steps, the Senate will work to:***

- 1) Preserve and protect a free and appropriate public education;*
- 2) Improve the quality of and access to educational opportunities, including expanded access to and investment in high-quality early education programs to ensure children have the necessary foundation for future success ;*
- 3) Improve pathways to enhanced educational outcomes for all children, including students with disabilities and English language learners;*
- 4) Ensure an equitable and sustainable educational funding stream for all communities to adequately educate all students from early learners to high school graduates and beyond;*
- 5) Review, assess and advance policies to make college more affordable and improve access to quality higher education opportunities, and;*
- 6) Pursue a review of existing policies – in alignment with efforts to cultivate and support a highly skilled modern workforce –to improve approaches dedicated to educating, training and preparing students for the jobs of tomorrow.*

### ***Building and Supporting a Highly Skilled Modern Workforce***

As our economy has evolved from a commodities-based, manufacturing economy of the last century to the service-oriented, skills-based global innovation economy of today, it is important that our Commonwealth’s workforce development and skills training programs continually innovate and improve to help our workers gain the skills to find good paying jobs, meet the needs and demands of employers, and move up the ladder of economic opportunity.

From Cape Cod Community College in Barnstable to North Shore Agricultural and Technical High School in Danvers, to precision high-tech manufacturers like Empire Prototype in Attleboro and Hoppe Technologies in Chicopee, to entrepreneurs, innovators and researchers at Lincoln Labs in Lexington and Greentown Labs in Somerville, the Massachusetts Senate learned firsthand about the importance of

policies focused on better educating, better training, and better preparing our workforce with the skills needed for the jobs of tomorrow.

Hearing directly from stakeholders, including directors from regional and local chambers of commerce, large to mid-sized regional employers, small businesses, and officials from public higher education institutions all across the state, the issues of student achievement, career planning and preparedness, school to career training, workforce readiness, and improved access to technical and vocational educational opportunities were identified as specific areas that warrant detailed consideration and review by policymakers.

***Finding*** – *As an essential component to our Commonwealth’s long term economic competitiveness and vitality, and recognizing that affordable higher educational opportunities pave the way to a highly skilled workforce, we, the Massachusetts State Senate, recognize and find that the demand for an educated, highly skilled, modern workforce requires the development and advancement of policies responsive to the needs of all employers and essential to supporting a strong economic foundation that mutually benefits all people in every corner of the Commonwealth without disproportionately impacting one region over another.*

***As next steps, the Senate will work to:***

- 1) Advance policies to educate, equip, and train workers and improve workforce skills needed for people to attain better paying jobs and to enable employers to grow and succeed in a rapidly evolving global economy;*
- 2) Continuously assess the workforce needs of regional employers in a collaborative and inclusive process that engages stakeholders from the employer, education, economic development and workforce development communities;*
- 3) Develop and promote public-private partnerships and collaborations designed to align educational advancement with skilled employment opportunities across all regions;*
- 4) Review existing policies and develop adaptive approaches to enhance educational and workforce readiness to meet the hiring the needs and demands of employers;*
- 5) Conduct a comprehensive review of best practices to existing workforce training policies in peer and competitors states;*
- 6) Improve workforce training and support the role of technical and vocational educational opportunities as paths to career success, and;*
- 7) Strengthen and support connections between our public higher educational institutions and our Commonwealth’s employer community as part of a coordinated and collaborative approach focused on supporting a budding innovation-based workforce.*

## **Preserving Accessible and Affordable Health Care**

Accessibility, affordability, high quality of care, transparency, and improved patient outcomes are principles fundamental to ensuring our Commonwealth remains a leader in the health care arena and a model for the rest of the nation.

Recognizing that access to health care is vital to the common good and well-being of the people, the Massachusetts State Senate engaged residents, employers, health care professionals, hospitals, and others to engage in the process, and learned from stakeholder participation that the continued success of ensuring reliable and affordable health care to all of our people is threatened by continued health care cost growth and excessive market power possessed by some of our state's largest health care providers.

From community health centers in Lowell and Quincy, to independent senior living communities in Milton and Northbridge, to the rehabilitative and special education school in Canton, to regional meetings held forums in Lynn, North Andover and Plymouth, we found support for accessible and affordable health care is linked to improving quality of life, keeping people healthy, and lowering overall costs associated with improved health and wellness. To build upon our Commonwealth's successful health care reforms of yesterday, we must work to rein in the rising costs of today that burden our businesses, hurt our working families, and stifle economic opportunity and prosperity.

***Finding*** – *Recognizing our Commonwealth has led the nation in successfully expanding access, providing a high quality of care and reforming the way health care is delivered, we, the Massachusetts State Senate, find sustaining our state's collective health care reform achievements to date requires an appropriate balance to contain increasing costs and manage evolving health care models that risk to undermine economic opportunity for our small businesses and working families and threaten the preservation of accessible and affordable health care vital to the common good and welfare of our people.*

### ***As next steps, the Senate will work to:***

- 1) Improve the quality of and preserve access to affordable health care;*
- 2) Encourage efforts and support policies aimed at slowing health care cost growth;*
- 3) Improve resources and deliver critical supports to our most vulnerable residents, including children and young adults with multiple disabilities, individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities, individuals and families impacted by mental illness, caring for at risk children, and ensuring our elders have access to home care services;*

- 4) *Identify and encourage pathways to empower patients to access affordable care through the continued enhancement of consumer information, and;*
- 5) *Improve coordination and integration of care for behavioral health, physical health and long-term care services and supports for elderly individuals and those with disabilities.*

### **Increasing Access to Affordable Housing**

Each and every hard working family in Massachusetts deserves access to a decent and affordable home as a means to achieve economic security, stability and success. A common theme heard at each of the eight public forums held throughout “Commonwealth Conversations” was the challenge of meeting affordable housing needs in light of the longstanding foreclosure crisis, rising housing costs, and a high cost of living.

We heard direct testimony from advocates, community coalition groups, regional planners, home builders, realtors, residents, and others on the need to take actionable steps and commit new resources to permanent solutions to address our Commonwealth’s housing and homelessness challenges. From improving access to affordable housing to the desire for housing policy designed for rural communities, from reducing barriers to increased housing production to curbing foreclosures, to ensuring adequate resources to reduce homelessness, there is a general public consensus that measures are needed to improve the lack of affordable housing opportunities. However, without the necessary actions, it is clear the combined pressures of increasing housing costs outpacing wages, rising rents and the challenge of the state’s high cost of living imperil our quality of life and the vibrancy of our neighborhoods and communities.

***Finding*** – *Recognizing that all hard working families deserve a decent and affordable home as a means to economic stability and an improved quality of life, and as a strategic building block to support our Commonwealth’s economic well-being, we, the Massachusetts State Senate, find that improving access to housing opportunities to support a strong middle class and prosperous economy requires a comprehensive approach to benefit all people in all regions of the Commonwealth by promoting asset development for families, increasing the availability and production of affordable housing, reducing homelessness, and ensuring families and individuals with a foundation for long-last economic security.*

***As next steps, the Senate will work to:***

- 1) *Improve access to and preservation of housing opportunities;*
- 2) *Advance policies encouraging the development and production of new affordable housing to support local and regional needs;*

- 3) *Invest resources and support the development of accessible and affordable housing opportunities for individuals with disabilities;*
- 4) *Improve the quality of and access to programs and services focused on increasing access to supportive and transitional housing for homeless individuals and families, and ensuring critical supports for extremely low-income families and individuals;*
- 5) *Support the promotion of asset development policies aimed at assisting families and individuals to grow and protect their financial assets, and;*
- 6) *Conduct a review of existing foreclosure prevention policies in peer states and implement best practices to protect homeowners and rebuild communities hardest hit by the longstanding foreclosure crisis.*

### **Strengthening Our Commonwealth's Economic Foundation**

Our Commonwealth possesses many elements for a strong and prosperous economy to take root, evolve, and grow, as our universities, highly-educated workforce, and existing strongholds across an array of established and emerging industries – biotech, clean energy, health care, high-tech, financial services, manufacturing, research and development, and tourism – have been key cornerstones to our Commonwealth's core economic foundation. A foundation that can only be strengthened and supported by universal access to affordable health care, affordable housing opportunities, a modern and reliable transportation system, a highly educated and highly skilled workforce, exceptional schools, and thriving small businesses, and of course, the ingenuity and work ethic of the people who make it all possible for our Commonwealth to move forward and play to our strengths as an innovation-based economy.

From our first public meeting in Great Barrington to our last public forum in Buzzards Bay, economic development issues, whether local, regional or statewide, were common place for discussion. Hearing from community development organizations, regional employers, regional economic development partnerships, small businesses and other key stakeholders revealed general support for state and local government to work collaboratively across all regions of our state to explore ideas and pursue solutions necessary to meeting the diverse economic development needs of every community and every region.

In addition to the support for regional collaborations and state-local partnerships, a number of employers – both big and small – in emerging industries across the different regions communicated their interest for state government to consider new policies to ease the cost of doing business, cultivate a competitive business climate, and market our state's economic assets. In return, we will, as a Commonwealth, be attracting and encouraging business investment that will expand job opportunities, facilitate sustainable regional economic growth and inspire our creative pioneers in emerging industries to cultivate new ideas as part of a broader strategy to build a global

innovation economy that fuels growth and widens the circle of prosperity touching all corners of the Commonwealth.

***Finding*** – *Our Commonwealth’s economic core is founded upon the ingenuity, inspiration and hard work of the people, and recognizing that we must support a gamut of well-established and emerging innovative industries as foundational cornerstones, we, the Massachusetts State Senate find that advancing opportunity and ensuring economic vitality requires us to play to our economic strengths and develop a broad framework to responsibly promote enduring economic security and fuel economic growth without undercutting our comparative advantages and collective efforts to make our economy more competitive and more prosperous for all people in all regions of the Commonwealth.*

***As next steps, the Senate will work to:***

- 1) Advance policies to support innovation, entrepreneurship, and small business development to facilitate economic growth in all regions;*
- 2) Support the development and coordination of a cohesive economic development strategy to empower local governments, encourage regional collaborations, and promote state-local partnerships to support the sustainable growth of sustainable local and regional economies ;*
- 3) Pursue a review of existing policies to improve and develop approaches necessary to easing the cost of doing business and fostering a competitive climate to ensure responsible businesses of all sizes can secure the support and resources necessary to grow and expand without impediment, and;*
- 4) Assess, review and consider rational policies to make our Commonwealth’s tax code a fair reflection of the current economic realities by addressing out-of-date tax expenditures that are no longer effective in meeting the principles of adequacy, equity, predictability and simplicity and promoting economic growth and advancing opportunity.*

## ***A Commitment to the People***

*“Government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the Earth.” – Abraham Lincoln*

*“Commonwealth Conversations”* represents how a strong participatory democracy should involve the public in the process. As an exercise in civic engagement to learn from the people what is most important in their lives, we left Beacon Street behind and visited Main Street in communities all across our Commonwealth in a collective effort to better understand the concerns and priorities of all the people.

We, the Massachusetts State Senate, strive to adhere to the principles of collaboration and shared leadership, and commit to:

- 1) Rebuilding the peoples' faith in government and reducing cynicism by carrying forward the voices and innovative ideas of the people;*
- 2) Ensuring an active and effective state government reflective of our common values and dedicated to making Massachusetts an exceptional place to live, work and raise a family, and;*
- 3) Collectively act on a clear bi-partisan agenda that confronts the tough issues, embraces the challenges and advances economic opportunity to connect all people in all corners of our Commonwealth.*

We thank all of the people who engaged and participated in these public events across our Commonwealth: the small businesses and organizations we visited for making time for us, the people who deliver services to those in need, and most importantly, the residents who attended the public forums and made their voices heard.

With your help and commitment, we, the Massachusetts State Senate, are ready to go to work for you as this is really only the beginning of our conversation, not the end, and we look forward to discussing how we move Massachusetts forward together.