

**HOUSE . . . . . No. 4056**

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**The Commonwealth of Massachusetts**

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*August 3, 2021*

To the Honorable Senate and House of Representatives,

I am returning unsigned House Bill No. 4018, “An Act establishing a higher education affordability task force.”

This bill, originally included as an outside section in the FY22 budget, establishes a task force to evaluate the affordability of public and private higher education options in the Commonwealth. While I am supportive of continued efforts to improve the accessibility, stability, and quality of higher education in the Commonwealth, I believe the scope of the evaluation required by the task force is not reflective of the urgent need to rethink the higher education delivery system.

As a result, I returned this section, recommending instead that the Board of Higher Education (BHE) convene a task force to conduct a focused evaluation of the financing of public higher education in the Commonwealth given current trends in demographics and student enrollment, and to make recommendations for improvement and reform in order to ensure affordability to students, increase rates of on-time college completion, close gaps in degree attainment across demographic groups, and improve alignment with regional and statewide workforce needs. This is where the higher education community’s energies are best spent. In the absence of this more targeted approach, I do not support this task force.

For this reason, I am returning House Bill No. 4018 unsigned.

Respectfully submitted,

Charles D. Baker,  
*Governor*