SENATE DOCKET, NO. 421 FILED ON: 1/29/2021

SENATE . . . . . No. 825

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

PRESENTED BY:

Joanne M. Comerford

To the Honorable Senate and House of Representatives of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in General Court assembled:

The undersigned legislators and/or citizens respectfully petition for the adoption of the accompanying bill:

An Act improving access to affordable higher education.

PETITION OF:

NAME:	DISTRICT/ADDRESS:	
Joanne M. Comerford	*Hampshire, Franklin and Worcester*	
Michael O. Moore	*Second Worcester*	*3/9/2021*
Elizabeth A. Malia	*11th Suffolk*	*3/16/2021*
Sal N. DiDomenico	*Middlesex and Suffolk*	*4/26/2021*
Susannah M. Whipps	*2nd Franklin*	*5/6/2021*

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SENATE . . . . . No. 825

By Ms. Comerford, a petition (accompanied by bill, Senate, No. 825) of Joanne M. Comerford, Michael O. Moore and Elizabeth A. Malia for legislation to improve access to affordable higher education. Higher Education.

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

In the One Hundred and Ninety-Second General Court
(2021-2022)

An Act improving access to affordable higher education.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Court assembled, and by the authority of the same, as follows:

SECTION 1. The department of higher education shall review programs of financial aid for students attending public institutions of higher education in the commonwealth, including grants, tuition waivers and loan programs. Based on the review, the department shall make recommendations, including legislation, for comprehensive redesign and reform of the financial aid system to increase student access to higher education, improve affordability of higher education for students and families, and reduce opportunity and achievement gaps among students, particularly for students of color and disadvantaged populations.

The goals of the financial aid redesign and reform shall include:

(1) consolidating multiple overlapping assistance programs to improve efficiency and reduce duplication;

(2) reducing the burden of the application process and improving transparency, predictability and the ease of navigation for students and their families applying for and renewing financial assistance;

(3) lessening administrative costs, including the costs of oversight; and

(4) strengthening the ability of the general court to appropriately monitor, oversee and appropriate funds provided for student financial assistance.

In preparing its recommendations, the department shall consult with institutional financial aid officers, the office of student financial assistance and its financial aid advisory committee, groups representing students at the University of Massachusetts, state universities and community colleges, students and parents who navigate and use state financial aid, and other stakeholders. The department shall review the design of financial aid programs in other states and recommendations of experts. The department shall also solicit information from the chairs and vice chairs of the committee on higher education.

Before releasing its recommendations, the department shall hold an open public listening session to receive public input.

The department shall file its findings, recommendations and accompanying legislation, if any, with the clerks of the house of representatives and the senate and the joint committee on higher education not later than December 31, 2021.

SECTION 2. The department of higher education shall explore the feasibility of and prepare a plan for all graduates of high schools in the commonwealth to have available to them

(1) a free application process for public institutions of higher education, and

(2) automatic admission to a public community college.

In preparing the plan, the department shall consult with administrative officials at institutions of higher education, including admissions officers; groups representing students and parents; high school college counselors and other stakeholders. The department shall also consult with experts in higher education and expanding student opportunities. The department shall also solicit information from the chairs and vice chairs of the committee on higher education.

Before releasing its recommendations, the department shall hold an open public listening session to receive public input.

The department shall file its findings, recommendations and accompanying legislation, if any, with the clerks of the house of representatives and the senate and the joint committee on higher education not later than December 31, 2021.