



BENJAMIN FRANKLIN
INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
YOUR PATHWAY TO SUCCESS

December 17, 2021

Eric Lesser, Co-Chair
Josh Cutler, Co-Chair
The Future of Work Commission
24 Beacon St.
Boston, MA 02133

Dear Senator Eric Lesser and Representative Josh Cutler,

I am writing as a Boston resident and President and CEO of Benjamin Franklin Institute of Technology (BFIT), to offer my testimony to the Future of Work Commission. Based on almost 25 years of experience leading best-in-class non-profit organizations in the education, social service, and workforce development sectors, I would like to offer six recommendations to the Commission. These recommendations focus on the Commission's published charge to evaluate and develop: *policies and practices that assist workers and communities to thrive and maintain a robust economy while responding to rapid transformation of technology.*

As the senior most leader of the only college in the Commonwealth with a majority of Black and Latinx male students, my overarching suggestion is that the Commission center equity in codified ways whenever and wherever possible. This practice is the best way to demonstrate that we don't have any workers to waste.

The six specific ways I suggest doing this are as follows:

1) Understand, acknowledge, and highlight the value of Minority Serving Institutions in your report.

It is important to understand, acknowledge and value the critical nature of Minority Serving Institutions (MSI's) in our Commonwealth. Direct funds to Minority Serving Institutions recognize their track record of success educating communities of color. While events of the past 18 months nationally have led many people to seek out Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU's), HBCU's are but one of a handful of types of institutions where cultural competence is made primary and student perspectives are considered. MSI's are one of those institutions, and we have several here in the Commonwealth. We must dispel the false idea that employers must seek talent of color from outside of Massachusetts. There is plenty of untapped talent right here in our state. There is recent precedent for this model in line item 1599-2037 of the ARPA legislation signed into law by Governor Baker earlier this month:

Ms. Chang-Diaz, Mr. Eldridge, Ms. Rausch, Messrs. Gomez, Pacheco and Moore, Ms. Jehlen, Messrs. Hinds, Kennedy, Collins, O'Connor and Finegold move that the proposed new text be amended in section 2A, in item 1599-2037, in line 545, by inserting after the words “programs prioritized in this item” the following: - *“provided, however, that no less than \$7,500,000 shall be expended for accredited two-year colleges that are minority-serving institutions as defined by the United States Department of Education to train underserved populations for green jobs, as defined by the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics”*

While all colleges should strengthen their cultural competencies, as many have after the horrific events of the summer of 2020 –dubbed the summer of Racial Reckoning – now is the time to invest in Minority Serving Institutions because they developed this expertise with intentionality decades ago when there was no funding attached to the designation. Rather MSI’s developed this area of expertise because it was the right thing to do. By directing funding to Minority Serving Institutions, the Commission will automatically find easier uptake of training that centers on students of color who are eager to land “new economy” jobs that are bountiful and pay well.

2) Support funding for all two-year colleges—both public and private.

This is no time for distinctions without a difference. Recognize that many first-generation college students want and deserve the pride and increased earnings that come with a college credential. While short-term non-college credit training, has its place. I caution the commission against divesting from training that carries college credit in favor of “rapid reskilling” credentials that do not stack towards in-demand degrees from accredited institutions.

Recognizing that a wide array of workforce training exists and the needs of trainees throughout the state differ, it remains that our Commonwealth is one of the most highly educated states in this union. Therefore, to combat degree discrimination that many non-traditional workers experience, I urge you to focus on funding programs that offer transferable college credits or are delivered by colleges directly.

3) Reward organizations and colleges with grants and funding according to their outcomes.

Outcomes based funding is already a practice at the state level. But the interpretation is uneven across cabinets. To streamline and center an equity agenda, the legislature should consider creating a “common app” for state-issued RFPs emanating from three executive offices that comprise the Workforce Cabinet (EOLWD, EOHEd, and EOE). This approach would clarify how all three offices evaluate and offer more application points to institutions and organizations with a history of strong outcomes data (such as graduation rates, program participant retention earnings, and job placement). These requirements should reflect success among non-traditional students such as adult learners, young Black and Latinx men and women, low-income, and first generation to this country and to college. Privileging and prioritizing institutions and programs

that can prove exceptional delivery of services provides the highest rate of return on public investment.

4) Support state goals with specific alignment of public funds and policies to work that should be directed to environmental justice communities.

Example #1: If accelerating decarbonization initiatives is a state goal, then state efforts should focus on providing direct benefits to disadvantaged, low-income and communities of color in the process. Workforce training and development is crucial, especially in the communities that face increased rates of unemployment due to the pandemic. By incenting green job creation in communities of color, the state can tie workforce funding to these geographic areas and target the funding to job training areas that align with infrastructure upgrades required to combat climate.

Example #2: If the state commits to investing in electric vehicle (EV) charging infrastructure, then the EOLWD should incentivize local job creation to support work required to install and repair these charging stations. They can do this by providing funding for job training necessary to make sure our region has the labor required to install and maintain this new EV infrastructure. Such interrelated planning drives decarbonization efforts in the transportation sector while boosting job creation. Strategic planning like this will be a key component of the Future of Work—particularly for growing industries for which there is not currently a large workforce population.

5) Provide additional funding to students who are working and going to school.

Benjamin Franklin Institute of Technology has strong outcomes because our students attend classes full-time and because we make significant investments in student services that provide wrap-around supports to each and every enrollee. The fact is that even as full-time students, most learners at BFIT are also working. They somehow balance a full-time college coursework alongside their part- or full-time jobs. Half of working students at BFIT report picking up 25 hours or more each week to make ends meet. The state needs to make it easier to do both at the same time. Studies show that when students work 20 hours or more, it negatively impacts their ability to succeed in college. A solution to this is for the state to consider increasing Mass Grant funds for students who have very low incomes. A second support would be to permanently extending the deadline of the Mass Grant program to August 1st (instead of the historic May 1st) of every year to help make these funds available for students who make late decisions to pursue college. *A majority of very low-income two-year college students apply after May 1st, thus placing Mass Grants out of reach of those who need it most.*

6) [Support Wage Transparency legislation](#) .

If workers do not know their value, they will be undervalued. Unfortunately, Black and brown workers are those most negatively impacted by wage inequality and discrimination. While state funding can and should be directed to the labor-intensive work of wrap-around support that

enhances a student's ability to negotiate their salary, competitive salary adjustments, benefits offerings, and other compensations; it is currently too hard to find out that information. It is important to protect worker's rights to know more about their value through the Wage Transparency Act. Wupporting this legislation pending in the Commonwealth is one way to achieve that.

In closing, I thank Senator Lesser, Representative Cutler, and the Commission for the opportunity to submit this testimony. Your attention to these issues over the past year is commendable. I look forward to reading the report produced from this collective work and hope it will lead to a statewide plan for ensuring our future workforce is as diverse as they are qualified. I remain at the ready to collaborate with you at any time going forward.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Aisha Francis, Ph.D." The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Aisha Francis, Ph.D.
President & CEO
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