



**To:** MTA members  
**From:** MTA's Legislation, Policy and Political Action Division  
**Date:** May 8, 2024  
**Subject:** Senate Ways and Means Committee budget overview

The Senate Ways and Means Committee (SWM) budget proposal takes significant steps in the direction of the higher education vision that MTA members have advanced and fought for: a system where all students can earn a degree or certificate from any public college without taking on crushing debt or needing to work thirty to forty hours a week to make ends meet, where students will be supported by faculty and staff who have the wages and working conditions that make it possible for them to meet the needs of all students, and where school facilities are green and healthy.

The SWM budget includes several significant higher education initiatives, all made possible by our Fair Share victory:

- A free community college program that provides enough scholarship funding to cover tuition and fees for all students. While this is a major step forward, the MTA will continue to work to make it better. Most importantly, other than the emergencies fund described below, it doesn't cover the cost of food and housing, which is a larger cost than tuition and fees at community college. And it requires students to use their Pell grant first, just filling the gap between that and the cost of tuition and fees. It does, however, provide \$1,200 for books supplies and other expenses for Pell eligible students in addition to the \$1,200 they can receive from MASSGrant plus.
- \$10 million for a higher education persistence and basic needs program for state universities and community colleges. This fund will help students cover unanticipated costs that may jeopardize a student's ability to continue their education program, such as emergency needs related to transportation, housing, food, and childcare.
- An increase of \$25 million for the MASSGrant Plus program, which will increase scholarship aid and make public higher education more affordable for low- and moderate-income students.
- A commission to plan the next steps in expanding access to high quality affordable public higher education. The MTA will be represented on the commission and will fight to advance our vision on affordability, wages and working conditions, the other supports students need, and green and healthy buildings paid for by the state.

The SWM budget also recognizes the fiscal crisis facing so many of our K-12 schools and takes modest steps to address the crisis. The MTA will aim to increase funding through floor amendments

in the short term and by building member power to win more significant victories in the future. The SWM K-12 budget highlights include the following:

- Minimum education aid of \$104 per student, matching the House and greatly exceeding the \$30 per student proposed by the Governor. This costs \$37 million and brings the total increase in Chapter 70 proposed by SWM to \$316 million.
- \$15 million in rural aid. This would restore aid that the House had proposed cutting in half. The MTA will advocate for a further increase.
- \$10 million for Literacy Launch which will provide grants to school districts to support effective literacy instruction.
- \$7.5 million for Mental Health Supports and Wraparounds and \$6 million for Social Emotional Learning Grants.
- A commission, of which the MTA would be a member, to study and make recommendations relative to the capacity of the Massachusetts School Building Authority to meet current and future school building needs and ensure equity in grant funding across the Commonwealth.