

MASSACHUSETTS  
**HIGHTECHNOLOGYCOUNCIL**

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## **TESTIMONY**

### **Statement before the Joint Committee on Education**

#### **In Support of:**

**SENATE BILL 327 AND HOUSE BILL 444  
AN ACT TO FURTHER NARROW THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP  
AND  
AN ACT TO IMPROVE AND EXPAND EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY**

**October 13, 2015**

**Mark J. Gallagher, Executive Vice President  
Massachusetts High Technology Council**

Thank you, Chairwoman Chang-Diaz, Chairwoman Peisch and members of the Committee for the opportunity to speak today regarding legislation that would strengthen public education in the Commonwealth and expand access to public charter schools. My name is Mark Gallagher and I am Executive Vice President for Public Policy and Communications at the Massachusetts High Technology Council.

The Mass. High Tech Council is the Commonwealth's oldest and only cross-sector association of CEO-level leaders of technology-focused organizations. The Council has a 37-year history of non-partisan advocacy in support of one overarching mission: To make Massachusetts the world's most attractive place in which to live and work, and in which to create, operate, and grow high technology businesses.

Today, you will hear from many civic leaders about the social impacts that flow from a public education system where unacceptable achievement gaps persist and where too many children remain trapped in underperforming schools and are denied meaningful choice of educational opportunity. The Massachusetts High Tech Council certainly shares those well-founded concerns.

We offer our testimony today to urge you to support the expansion of charter schools, and to highlight and reinforce the particular impacts of the legislation before you on the expansion of our technology economy and, as importantly, the availability of economic opportunities for our fellow citizens.

Recently, we developed the Massachusetts Technology, Talent and Economic Reporting System or "MATTERS," a 50-state competitiveness dashboard freely available to all on our website. MATTERS

allows anyone to access key talent, cost and economic data and to use that data to benchmark Massachusetts against any other state or group of states.

MATTERS data reveals a current technology workforce in Massachusetts that is quite strong. Among the 50 states, we have the highest percentage of bachelor's degrees in our workforce and one of the highest ratios of tech employment to total employment in the nation. But MATTERS' talent demand data shows that Massachusetts is one of the most difficult states in which to hire technology talent. That is indeed an ongoing and significant challenge for our local technology employers and a primary focus of the High Tech Council's efforts.

Today, we respectfully ask you to view these talent supply-demand dynamics through a different, but related, frame. One that is focused not only on the challenges it presents to employers but on the opportunities it presents for our citizens, including today's school age children. The growing demand for technology talent is creating an increasing level of opportunity for those who have the STEM and other career readiness skills to seize those opportunities.

The Commonwealth is blessed with a public school system that is the envy of the nation. It is a simple fact, and point of pride, that on the whole, our public schools outperform those in other states. It is also a fact that the Education Reform Act of 1993 played a key role in creating that success. Through the Education Reform Act, the Commonwealth made a renewed commitment to its public schools by increasing resources, applying rigorous assessments, enhancing accountability and catalyzing innovation through the creation of public charter schools.

Since 1993 we have chosen to take other key steps to improve our public schools, including the passage of the Race to the Top legislation in 2010 which have allowed our public system to make additional incremental improvements.

But two troubling facts remain. First, all of our children will live in a world where global competition and the 21<sup>st</sup> Century economy require evermore complex skills and knowledge to succeed. And second, far too many of our children remain trapped in underperforming schools that hamper, rather than enhance, their chances of success. The social and economic consequences of failing to face these facts are enormous. We must continue to make incremental improvements and the time to take the next step is now.

Massachusetts has before it an incredible opportunity that we are well-positioned to seize, but only if we are willing to do so. We must choose to pursue that opportunity relentlessly, so that 21<sup>st</sup> Century employers will think it unimaginable to not be in Massachusetts and all of our children and their parents will know that our public schools provide a clear path to limitless opportunity.

Show me a 6<sup>th</sup> grader in a failing school today, and assess what real opportunity for success that child has. Now fast forward ten years, and show me that child with a bachelor's degree in computer engineering from UMass Lowell or data science from WPI, and I will show you a young adult with a boundless future.

The charter school legislation before you today creates a well-designed mechanism for sustained, targeted improvement of all public schools and expansion of charter schools and their enrollment, which can meet

the demand for charter school seats and provide educational leaders with additional tools to address challenges in underperforming schools and school districts.

Together we can make the hard decisions and do the noble work necessary to provide ALL our children with a 21<sup>st</sup> Century education that prepares them for a lifetime of success and provide our economy with the talent-based fuel that powers it.

On behalf of the Mass High Tech Council, I thank you for your time and respectfully urge you to act favorably on the important public school improvement proposals before you today.