

TESTIMONY

Statement Before the Joint Committee on Education Regarding:

HOUSE BILL 495 and SENATE BILL 246 An Act Empowering Students and Schools to Thrive

October 4, 2023

**Elizabeth Mahoney, Vice President of Policy and Government Affairs
Massachusetts High Technology Council**

Dear Chair Garlick, Chair Lewis, and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

My name is Elizabeth Mahoney and I am the Vice President at the Massachusetts High Technology Council.

I am testifying in opposition to H.495 and S.246, which would undermine the standards and accountability system that has made Massachusetts a national leader in education.

It is critically important to both our students and the state's economy that we maintain a strong statewide standard for success for all students, and not replace one graduation standard with more than 300 different standards.

Eliminating the statewide graduation requirement [as the Thrive Act would do] would be an abdication of the state's obligation to provide a quality education to all children and do a disservice to the students of Massachusetts, particularly those in underperforming school districts.

Lowering the high school graduation standard would also worsen existing workforce challenges and threaten the state's economic competitiveness. Our economy is going to need more skilled workers in the coming years, not fewer.

The data shows that there is tremendous value in the current graduation standard and underscores why eliminating it would be so detrimental to students.

Research shows that the MCAS exam is a reliable indicator of a student's college and career readiness; MCAS scores "predict long-term success and appear to reflect students' academic skills" not simply socio-economic status or school characteristics.

For the vast majority of students, the MCAS is not a barrier to graduation. It is one percent of students, about 700 statewide, for whom passing the test is the sole barrier to graduation. The state and local school districts should focus on ensuring those 700 students reach the bar the state has set, rather than eliminating a statewide standard for all students.

The Commonwealth should not walk away from the education reforms that have proven so successful.

Finally, the High Tech Council would like to note that while we oppose the policy proposed in these bills, we do believe the legislative process, with opportunity for robust public input, is best suited to the consideration and discussion of these complex issues, and we thank the committee for this hearing and look forward to continuing to engage with you as you consider these bills.