

TESTIMONY

Submitted to the Joint Committee on Education

In Support of:

H.592/S.256, An Act to Create and Expand Student Pathways to Success

H.564, An Act Incentivizing the Awarding of Industry-Recognized Credentials

H.444, An Act to Expand the Use of Career and Academic Plans

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

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on behalf of the Massachusetts High Technology Council, the Commonwealth's oldest cross-sector association of CEO-level leaders of technology, professional services, and research institutions. The Council has a 46-year history of non-partisan advocacy in support of our 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.

Last year, the High Tech Council launched [MassVision2050](#), a multi-year collaboration between private, public, and academic leaders to advance Massachusetts' global economic leadership. Its overarching goal is to accelerate capital investment and job creation while expanding economic opportunities and promoting social mobility, ultimately enhancing the quality of life for all Massachusetts residents.

One of the key priorities of MassVision2050 is to address the demand for skilled, job-ready talent across numerous tech-related industry sectors. Our Engaged Workforce initiative is bringing together stakeholders from business, education, and government to develop business/education partnerships and talent strategies that address persistent skills gaps and make opportunities more accessible to all Massachusetts residents.

The High Tech Council believes one of the ways we can help close the skills gap is by ensuring all Massachusetts students understand the college and career opportunities that are available to them and the pathways that will allow them to access those opportunities.

The Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education, together with Latinos for Education and The Education Trust, recently released a report on equity and student pathways entitled "Lifting Our Communities: Building Education Pathways to Economic Opportunity for All." This report makes clear that college and career pathways are one important way to help close opportunity gaps and ensure students from communities of color and economically disadvantaged communities have equal access to good-paying jobs in industries like tech and the life sciences.

As a member of the Student Pathways to Success Coalition, the High Tech Council supports several bills before the Committee that will advance proven opportunities for success for all Massachusetts students.

H.592 and S.256, An Act to Create and Expand Student Pathways to Success, would require the state – in partnership with local school districts and employers – to take several concrete steps toward providing college and career pathways for all students.

This bill would require the adoption of a North Star Goal for ensuring that all students have access to key elements of pathways programs: college credit, work-based learning opportunities, industry-recognized credentials, and dedicated career counseling. It would also codify the successful Workforce Skills Cabinet as a permanent body and charge it with a number of tasks, including conducting a biennial audit of pathways programs and producing an annual report on the current and future workforce needs of the Commonwealth. This legislation would also require that the state coordinate all administrative and governance activities related to pathways, to ensure that there is a clear focus on equity across-the-board and that programs have common sets of goals and metrics for success.

This bill would also increase access to in-demand vocational educational programs. Student demand for high-quality vocational education has exceeded the number of seats for many years now, and the current policy structure makes it difficult for greater numbers of high schools to offer these opportunities to their students. This legislation would remove those barriers and make it easier for all high schools across the state to set up vocational education programs that give their students work-based learning opportunities in specific occupations, positioning them to enter the workforce and secure a good job in a high-growth field.

As technology has become ever-present in industries, even non-tech industries, knowledge of computer science will benefit all students. Far too few high schools across the state currently offer computer science coursework, especially in Gateway Cities and other traditionally under-resourced communities, and this legislation would change that by requiring all high schools to offer at least one foundational computer science course by 2026.

This legislation would also help provide sustainable growth of pathways programs over the long term by embedding an incentive in the Chapter 70 formula to provide funding to districts based on the number of students who participate in pathway programs. This incentive would apply to students who participate in Early College, Innovation Career Pathways, or STEM Tech Career Academy programs.

The High Tech Council recognizes that there is a critical role for employers to play in expanding work-based learning opportunities for students. This legislation would require the state to conduct a study on the current landscape of business/school partnerships and provide recommendations on how to remove any barriers that may be preventing more work in this area.

H.592/S.256 and H.564 would provide financial incentives to school districts that provide opportunities for high school students to earn industry-recognized credentials (IRC) in in-demand professions. Students who earn an IRC are more likely to graduate from high school on time, attain an associate degree, graduate from a community college, and enroll in a four-year higher education institution. Other states have enacted financial incentives that have proven very successful in getting more high schools to provide such opportunities for their students.

We know that our state can improve certain fundamental elements of the high school experience for all students, even those who aren't currently enrolled in a formal pathway program. One of the most important aspects is to ensure that all students have meaningful, dedicated counseling on how they can identify and achieve their goals for higher education and the workforce. H.592/S.256 and H.444 would require all high schools to universalize access to the MyCAP program for all students by 2026. The MyCAP program is a successful model, based on research and evidence, that empowers every educator in a school building—not just guidance counselors—to provide students with information on how to plan for their futures.

The High Tech Council urges you to support these bills that will increase opportunities for all the students of Massachusetts and help Massachusetts employers fill the jobs of the future.

Thank you for your consideration.