

TESTIMONY

Submitted to the Joint Committee on Initiative Petitions

Written Testimony Related to the Committee's March 4, 2024, Hearing on Ballot Initiative NO. 23-36, An Act Requiring that Districts Certify that Students have Mastered the Skills, Competencies, and Knowledge of the State Standards as a Replacement for the MCAS Graduation Requirement (HB4252)

March 6, 2024

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

The Honorable Cindy Friedman
Senate Chair, Special Joint Committee on Initiative Petitions
State House, Room 313

The Honorable Alice Peisch
House Chair, Special Joint Committee on Initiative Petitions
State House, Room 234

Dear Chair Peisch, Chair Friedman, and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony on this proposal. My name is Elizabeth Mahoney, and I am the Vice President of Policy and Government Affairs for the Massachusetts High Technology Council, the Commonwealth's oldest cross-sector association of CEO-level leaders of technology, professional services, and research institutions.

I am writing to express our opposition to House Bill 4252 (HB4252), "An Act Requiring that Districts Certify that Students have Mastered the Skills, Competencies, and Knowledge of the State Standards as a Replacement for the MCAS Graduation Requirement."

As an organization representing the investment, workforce, and competitive business climate priorities of the Commonwealth's innovation and tech-driven economy, we believe that maintaining the MCAS exam as a graduation requirement is vital for the future success of our students and the prosperity of our state.

It is paramount that we uphold a strong statewide standard for academic success for both our students and the state's economy. The MCAS has been a cornerstone of our education system for two decades. It has played a significant role in catapulting Massachusetts to the top of the nation in K-12 education by ensuring that all students, regardless of their background or location, are held to the same rigorous standard. Eliminating the MCAS graduation requirement and replacing it with over 300 different standards would lead to inconsistency and inequality across

districts, reversing decades of progress and jeopardizing the futures of our high school graduates. This would be particularly detrimental to students in underperforming school districts, compromising the very purpose of statewide education reform.

Furthermore, Massachusetts' strong education system has been instrumental in attracting talent and fostering a thriving economy. The MCAS has played a pivotal role in maintaining our state's reputation for excellence in this area. According to Brown University research, "high school MCAS scores predict long-term success and appear to reflect students' academic skills" rather than socio-economic status or school characteristics. The MCAS has proven to be a reliable indicator of a student's college and career readiness. Eliminating it as a graduation requirement would amount to a huge step backward in the Commonwealth's quest to ensure that all Massachusetts high school graduates acquire the skills needed to be successful in their futures.

Moreover, the MCAS serves as a valuable tool for promoting equity by ensuring that every student has access to a high-quality education. The initiative petition is misleading in its portrayal of maintaining statewide standards. In reality, it seeks to eliminate the statewide standard, leading to a lack of accountability and consistency in our education system. The MCAS provides us with a clear view of how school systems, schools, and various demographic subgroups are performing against statewide benchmarks. Without it, these groups get lost in the statistical averages, and there will be no statewide baseline measurement of whether students in different districts are receiving the same quality of education.

Contrary to the arguments of those who wish to eliminate the MCAS exam as a graduation requirement, the MCAS is not a barrier to graduation for most students. Only about 1 percent of students, approximately 700 out of over 71,000 statewide, face MCAS as the sole barrier to graduation. Instead of lowering the bar for graduation for all students, our focus should be on providing support and resources to help these students succeed.

The Massachusetts High Tech Council urges you to consider the long-term consequences of eliminating the MCAS as a graduation requirement. Let us continue to uphold rigorous standards and ensure that every student receives the high-quality education they deserve. Our state's future prosperity depends on maintaining the excellence that the MCAS represents.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



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