

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT:

Sarah Blodgett, Office of Senate President Karen E. Spilka, Sarah.Blodgett@masenate.gov

Ben Holt, Office of Senator Michael J. Rodrigues, Bentley.Holt@masenate.gov

Mark Sternman, Office of Senator Joan B. Lovely, Mark.Sternman@masenate.gov

Derek Silver, Office of Senator Anne Gobi, Derek.Silver@masenate.gov

Senate Passes Bill to Increase Higher Education Opportunities for People with Disabilities

Honoring the 30th Anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act

(BOSTON – 08/03/20) On Thursday, July 28th the Massachusetts State Senate passed legislation which removes existing barriers for students with intellectual disabilities, autism spectrum disorders or other developmental disabilities so they can attend public institutions of higher education. The bill, which passed with bipartisan support, honors the spirit of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), which was signed into law 30 years ago this week by President George H.W. Bush.

Under An Act Creating Higher Education Opportunities for Students with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, students would not be required to pass the MCAS, have a high school diploma, meet minimum requirements for academic courses, or take college entrance exams in order to access inclusive academic, social, and career development opportunities on college campuses with their peers. In addition, the bill also makes clear that strengthening access to higher education for students with disabilities is a goal of the Commonwealth's higher education system.

“We have made great strides in Massachusetts to provide inclusive opportunities for persons with disabilities, but there is always more work to be done,” said **Senate President Karen E. Spilka (D-Ashland)**. “I appreciate the overwhelming support for advancing this bill and look forward to seeing it make its way through the legislative process. I would like to thank Senators Rodrigues, Lovely and Gobi for their attention to this important issue.”

“The opportunity to attend one of our many state community colleges, colleges and universities and the further opportunities that creates in life is something that many people strive for. All students deserve that regardless of their abilities,” said **Senator Anne Gobi (D-Spencer), co-chair of the Joint Committee on Higher Education**.

“As we celebrate the 30th anniversary of the groundbreaking Americans With Disabilities Act, I commend Senate President Spilka, Chairman Rodrigues, Speaker DeLeo, House Speaker Pro Tempore Haddad and their colleagues in the Legislature for creating opportunities in higher education for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities,” said **University of**

**Massachusetts President Marty Meehan.** “This legislation builds on the university’s ongoing efforts to expand access to higher education through innovative programming.”

“Now, on the 30th anniversary of the ADA, the strongest civil rights law in the nation for people with disabilities, we at the MDSC applaud Senate President Spilka, Chair Rodrigues, Senator Lovely and members of the Massachusetts State Senate for passing Senate Bill S. 2844, which will open doors of opportunity for students with intellectual disabilities to gain access to higher education opportunities in an inclusive college setting,” said **Maureen Gallagher, Executive Director of the Massachusetts Down Syndrome Congress.** “For too long, public school options for students with intellectual disabilities transitioning to adulthood have been limited and the passage of this bill removes those existing barriers and ensures that people with intellectual disabilities have access to higher education that will lead to more opportunities for meaningful integrated employment and a fulfilling life in the community.”

Building on the success of the Massachusetts Inclusive Concurrent Enrollment Initiative (MAICEI) grant program, the bill codifies that program, which enables school districts and public institutions of higher education to partner together to offer inclusive concurrent enrollment initiative options for students with disabilities ages 18 to 22. Since 2007, over 1,200 students with disabilities have taken advantage of the opportunity to participate academically and socially in the life of participating colleges in Massachusetts through the MAICEI program.

In response to the challenges facing school districts and public higher education institutions during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Senate bill ensures no additional costs are placed on a school district beyond the existing obligations already required under state and federal special education law.

Furthermore, the bill also ensures that colleges are not required to bear any additional costs of providing individual supports and services for students with severe intellectual disabilities, severe autism spectrum disorders, or other severe developmental disabilities who attend the college through the MACEI initiative.

Finally, the bill delays the implementation of the requirements placed on our school districts and higher education institutions within the bill until the 2021–2022 school year.

The bill now heads to the Massachusetts House of Representatives.

###