



Joint Committee on Ways and Means Hearing
Education and Local Aid
Monday, March 23, 2026 - 11:00 a.m.
Lawrence High School, Lawrence, Massachusetts

Senator Payano, Representative Duffy, and Members of the Committee, thank you for this opportunity to provide comments on the education-related budget recommendations filed by Governor Healey and Lt. Governor Driscoll in their budget recommendations for Fiscal Year 2026.

My name is JD Chesloff, President and CEO of the Massachusetts Business Roundtable. At the Roundtable, an organization of more than 95 CEOs and senior executives from large employers across the Commonwealth, our policy agenda - "[A Talent Agenda to Drive Massachusetts Competitiveness](#)" - centers on the state's competitiveness with a particular focus on recruiting, retaining, and developing diverse talent pipelines while fostering a competitive environment for growth.

The secret to Massachusetts' economic success has historically been its population of well-trained, highly educated, and diverse talent. For decades, this has been the Commonwealth's greatest competitive advantage. However, this advantage is currently under threat due to three key challenges, namely: the high cost of living, the outmigration of talent, and the high costs of doing business in the Commonwealth.

In the face of these well-known challenges, Roundtable members continue to express optimism about Massachusetts, citing the state's highly educated workforce; proximity to world-class higher education and health care institutions; and a strong, dynamic ecosystem of innovation and economic clusters that drive collaboration and a cross-pollination of ideas. Some of that optimism is driven by our best in the nation public education system.

One way to address our ongoing talent challenges is by tapping the pools of untapped talent in Massachusetts that are not fully connected to the workforce. And we can do this by prioritizing education and workforce development policies that invest in "grow our own" strategies aimed to meet the state's current and future workforce needs and offer residents pathways to opportunity.

Through the Roundtable's Talent Agenda, we have identified key strategies for developing untapped talent and creating diverse talent pipelines. Today, I will focus on those initiatives that span the education continuum, namely: Child Care and Early Childhood Education; Expanding Career Opportunities for Immigrants; Developing Education Pathways for All Students; and Connecting Employers to Diverse Talent at Two- and Four-Year Institutions.

Child Care and Early Childhood Education

That the state's talent pipeline starts in the earliest years of a child's education. The Roundtable has long viewed child-care and early education as an economic development issue, a workforce development issue, and a necessary component of the current and future competitiveness of the Commonwealth. The Roundtable, in collaboration with the Massachusetts Business Coalition for Early Childhood Education, recently submitted a letter of support for the following items, which I will reiterate today:

We respectfully ask for your continued support for the Commonwealth Cares for Children (C3) Grants, which are driving significant gains for the field, and we encourage you to increase funding for the program to \$500 million to help address inflation and maintain the program's efficacy. Furthermore, we support both the Governor's proposed \$133 million increase to the Child Care Financial Assistance (CCFA) Program to support access for eligible families and the proposed \$11.45 million increase to expand access to high-quality pre-kindergarten opportunities for students and families in Gateway Cities through the Commonwealth Preschool Partnership Initiative (CPPI). Finally, we look forward to continuing to work in partnership with the Commonwealth to support the EEC Employer Child Care Innovation Fund, which the legislature established in the FY25 state budget.

Expand Career Opportunities for Immigrants

Immigrants contribute significantly to the state's economic activity, and were it not for immigration, Massachusetts would have lost population and workers over the past decade. However, many immigrants face challenges in participating in the workforce due to a series of barriers, most notably language. The Roundtable supports the state's continued investment in ESOL and Adult Basic Education (ABE) programs. As the state works to address workforce shortages and strengthen economic competitiveness, sustained investments in these programs, particularly vocational ESOL, will be critical to ensure that more residents can participate in and contribute to the state's economy.

Develop Education Pathways for All Students

For decades, Massachusetts has led the nation with its public K-12 education system. This has ensured that students receive a high-quality public education while enabling Massachusetts' employers to access the talent they need to grow and compete. In 1993 and again in 2019, the business community supported substantial increases in state funding for public education on the premise that they would be accompanied by high

expectations for all students and a transparent system for measuring progress and results.

The Roundtable continues to collaborate with key partners to expand opportunities for students. This includes working partners such as the Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education, the Massachusetts Alliance for Early College, and the Workforce Solutions Group. As you develop the FY27 budget, the Roundtable respectfully asks that you prioritize: the Commonwealth's Early College Initiatives, Career and Technical Education programs, Early Literacy High Dosage Tutoring Programs, and School-to-Career Connecting Activities. Together, these programs play an essential role in ensuring more students are prepared for, and connected to, the jobs that drive the state's economy today and into the future.

Connecting Employers to Diverse Talent at Two- and Four-Year Institutions

There is an opportunity to offset the outmigration of residents the Commonwealth experiences each year by finding more ways to connect graduates from two- and four-year institutions with employers, particularly in in-demand industries that align with the state's economic and workforce development goals. This can be achieved through co-ops, internships, apprenticeships and stronger connections between industry and higher education.

We strongly support these strategies, as well as programs before the Committee today, including MassEducate and MassReconnect, two key programs aimed to expand access to higher education and strength the Commonwealth's workforce pipelines. At a time when employers in many industries are facing persistent talent shortages, these initiatives are key as we help upskill and reskill residents into high-demand jobs statewide.

At the Roundtable, we are focused on strengthening the connection between education, workforce, and economic development by intentionally connecting educational and workforce opportunities to in-demand jobs. In doing so, we can both grow and diversify the state's workforce pipeline and strengthen the educational and economic outcomes of young people.

We are grateful for the Committee's consideration and for your leadership in ensuring that Massachusetts continues to invest in its most important competitive advantage - its people - by ensuring access to highest quality public education system in the nation.