



Testimony by Dr. Susan F. Lusi, President and CEO, Mass Insight Education & Research

**H.555 An Act Relative to Establishing Flexibilities of School Districts
and H.3632 An Act to Enable the Establishment of Innovation Partnership Zones**

Hearing of the Joint Committee on Education, Massachusetts General Court

May 31, 2019

As Prepared for Delivery

Chairwoman Peisch and Chairman Lewis, members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. For the record, my name is Susan F. Lusi and I am the president & CEO of Mass Insight Education & Research. I am here today to testify in favor of both H.555 and H.3632.

Founded in 1997, Mass Insight is an independent national nonprofit organization dedicated to changing lives and changing schools. Our mission is to provide leadership in closing achievement and opportunity gaps for underserved students to drive college and career success by focusing on system transformation and student academic success. Many of you know us through our work with high schools across Massachusetts to expand and diversify enrollment in Advanced Placement STEM & English courses, work that has helped Massachusetts lead the nation in AP success. But Mass Insight has also worked for more than a decade in low performing schools and districts across the country, including supporting partnership zones most recently in Colorado, Indiana, and Texas. In fact, it was our 2007 report *The Turnaround Challenge*—called by the then U.S. secretary of education Arnie Duncan the “bible of school turnaround”—that helped to launch partnership zone initiatives across the nation.

With the legislature currently considering a significant increase in our investment in public education, an investment we all agree is needed so that schools have the resources they need to educate an increasingly diverse student body, H.555 and H.3632 provide a timely new school improvement option by expanding the flexibilities that help schools innovate and students learn.

At Mass Insight, we believe that getting conditions right is crucial to efforts to improve schools. By conditions we mean the additional learning time for students; time for teachers to collaborate; flexibility in scheduling students and grouping and regrouping students throughout the year; flexibility in staffing – both hiring and exiting, and also in the types of positions created in a staffing structure; flexibility in programming; and flexibility in how dollars are allocated – all

with an eye toward putting student needs first. As we continue to hold school districts accountable for results, we should also consider ways in which school districts can change conditions to raise their performance.

H.555 and H.3632 establish a process that allows school districts or the commissioner to create Partnership Zones and, through a fair and transparent process, for school districts or the commissioner to change the conditions under which schools operate. Neither bill proposes a one size fits all solution to improve schools. Rather the bills encourage, through a process of community engagement, including in H.3632 a so-called parent trigger, steps for developing the purpose and goals of a zone, working through a memorandum of understanding to establish the management and operation of the zone, and any changes to collective bargaining agreements that might be necessary to respond to local conditions, including a process for resolving disputes over amendments to the local CBA.

In our experience what is vitally important is creating conditions that put students first and there are multiple pathways to achieve this goal. Let me just share with you two recent examples from Mass Insight's work.

Since 2015 we have partnered with the school district in Aurora, CO on the development and implementation of a district-led Transformation Zone to help turn around the lowest performing high school in Colorado and improve four neighborhood feeder schools. By working closely with district leaders, teachers, members of the community, and state officials to create a zone under Colorado's innovation school law, we were able to help Aurora to address the root causes of low performances in the five schools, change the conditions holding schools back, provide more targeted support from the district, and adopt greater local control. Aurora's Central High school has moved out of the state's lowest accountability category and four of the five schools have seen gains in student achievement. I have included a copy of our Aurora case study in my testimony for your review.

Finally, I wanted to briefly mention work we are doing here in Boston with the community-based Grove Hall Alliance (GHA) as an example of how school innovation can develop more organically. Five school leaders have engaged their community in the Grove Hall neighborhood to develop a grass-roots strategy designed to provide neighborhood students with a PK-12 pathway of high performing schools. This is exciting work that is still in the incubation stage. But it has great potential as a school improvement approach, and I have attached a recent Boston Globe editorial about this project to my testimony.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in favor of H.555 and H.3632. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have and to work with the Committee and Secretary Peyser on advancing this legislation.