



S. 762 and H. 1206

An Act Relative to Advanced Placement Examinations

Testimony to the Joint Committee on Higher Education
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As Prepared for Delivery

Chairwoman Gobi, Chairman Roy, and members of the Joint Committee on Higher Education, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. For the record, my name is Dr. Susan Lusi and I'm the president and CEO of Mass Insight Education & Research. I'm here to testify in favor of S. 762 and H. 1206, legislation that will help students and families and make Massachusetts part of a growing national movement to enact consistent AP college credit policies.

These bills reward hard working students across Massachusetts for their achievements in rigorous College Board Advanced Placement (AP) courses. They address an inconsistency in the way our public universities and colleges award credit for passing the AP exam. They ensure that the state's AP credit policy is transparent and accessible to students and families as they consider which college they will attend and how to pay for it. Importantly, the bills also honor the dedication and outstanding work of our high school AP faculty, whose collective efforts have made Massachusetts number one in the nation in the percentage of students with a qualifying score of three or better for the last three years in a row.

Mass Insight works with over 80 Massachusetts high schools and 10,000 students to accomplish three goals: 1) increasing enrollment in challenging AP STEM and English classes; 2) increasing the enrollment of underserved students in AP classes; and, most important for these bills, 3) increasing the number of qualifying scores of three or better on AP exams. We motivate and support students to do well on the AP exam so that they can receive college credit for their high school work and save some money on college expenses. Achieving a qualifying score should reward students for their excellence in challenging AP courses. Unfortunately, for some Massachusetts students, it does not.

The Massachusetts public higher education system is inconsistent in how AP credits are rewarded across the campuses. Policies differ from campus to campus and from both within and across each sector of the public system. Let me illustrate with two examples. A score of three may be accepted for credit at one institution but not at another, even for the same course. Consider for

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example Physics 1 and 2. According to data provided by the College Board, an AP score of three results in college credit at U Mass Amherst, U Mass Dartmouth, and U Mass Lowell, but not at Bunker Hill Community College, Mass Bay Community College, Westfield State, or Worcester State where a score of four is required. Yet another example—a score of three will result in college credit in Chemistry at all state universities except for Westfield State and at U Mass Boston and Dartmouth, but not at Berkshire Community College, Cape Cod Community College, U Mass Amherst or U Mass Lowell. These are just two examples of a policy that simply makes no sense and sends a very discouraging message to students who are denied college credit for work well done.

Massachusetts high school students do very well on the AP exam. In 2018, according to data provided by the College Board, of the 17,000 AP exam scores of three or higher sent to the state's public institutions, 42% of those were scores of three. But African American, Hispanic, and low-income students are more likely to score a three and are more subject to the whims of admission policies at each individual campus where their passing score will not be accepted for credit. Of the scores sent to the public higher education system by African American students, 58% were scores of three; for low-income students, 51% of scores sent were threes; and for Hispanic students, 47% of scores sent were threes. These students have passed the AP exam. However, the lack of consistent state policy and a deference to academic freedom may make them ineligible for the college credit they earned through their excellent work in high school.

Both S. 762 and H. 1206 propose a commonsense approach to a consistent AP credit policy. The bills require that a qualifying score of three or higher be accepted for credit to satisfy degree requirements. Credits earned would be transferable and no cap would be placed on the number of credits earned by students who earn a three or better on AP exams. The legislation also requires each public institution to clearly publish this policy on their website, an important step for helping students and families make informed and thoughtful college choices.

As Massachusetts continues to make important strides advancing early college programs that make college more accessible and affordable, a consistent and transparent AP college credit policy will reward students for excellence in high school and strengthen our public system of higher education. Many of the students we work with across the Commonwealth take multiple AP exams and attend study sessions on Saturday mornings to receive additional instruction and support, all focused on getting an early start on college. This legislation awards credit for excellence in the classroom, especially for those students who are traditionally underserved. Thirty-one states have adopted similar policies, finding a way to balance academic freedom with a system-wide policy of access and affordability. Therefore, I respectfully ask the committee to give a favorable report to S. 762 and H. 1206.