



December 20, 2023

Honorable Maura Healey
Governor of the Commonwealth
Honorable Kim Driscoll
Lieutenant Governor of the Commonwealth

Dear Governor Healey and Lt. Governor Driscoll,

The current selective admissions policies used by 26 of 28 of the Commonwealth's vocational technical schools discriminate against students of color, students from low-income families, English language learners, and students with disabilities. We write today to ask you to direct the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) to prohibit selective criteria that discriminates against disadvantaged 8th graders and inhibits their social and economic mobility. **We believe children who grow up in poverty in Massachusetts—thousands of whom live in Gateway Cities—deserve the same opportunity to attend a vocational school.**

In 2003, vocational schools were directed by DESE regulation to rank order applicants based on selective criteria: middle school grades, attendance, disciplinary record, and subjective interviews. DESE admissions data shows these criteria discriminate against three protected classes of students: students of color, students with a disability and English language learners. The criteria also significantly discriminate against economically disadvantaged students. In response to these inequities, BESE approved new regulations in 2021 that permit districts the flexibility to change their policies to address these systemic opportunity gaps.

This regulation change proved to be inadequate, as 26 of 28 schools chose to continue the use of selective criteria. In fact, since the 2021 regulation change, admission rates for these four classes of students lowered, and opportunity gaps (the difference in percent offered admission between protected and non-protected applicant) grew wider. **In every measurable equity metric, the Commonwealth is moving in the wrong direction.**

In last year's admissions cycle however, two schools adopted a lottery for the first time-- Assabet Valley and Worcester Tech--and meaningfully closed opportunity gaps in admissions between protected classes of students and their peers. Lotteries worked to create an admissions standard that is fair to all students of all backgrounds.

We respectfully request you mandate lottery admissions at vocational schools to hold these institutions to the same equity standard our charter schools have successfully met for the



past three decades: a standard where every applicant within a municipality, regardless of race, national origin, disability, or household income, has the same chance at admission to these public high schools.

Thank you for your continued leadership and consideration.

Rep. Antonio F. D. Cabral, House Chair
Gateway Cities Legislative Caucus

Sen. John J. Cronin, Senate Chair
Gateway Cities Legislative Caucus

Rep. Patricia Duffy
Rep. Joseph McGonagle
Rep. Michael Kushmerek
Rep. Rita Mendes
Rep. Paul Schmid
Rep. Carole Fiola
Rep. Vanna Howard
Rep. Jessica Giannino
Rep. Christopher Hendricks
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Sen. Sal DiDomenico
Sen. Patricia Jehlen
Sen. Joanne Comerford
Sen. Brendan Crighton
Sen. Robyn Kennedy
Sen. Patrick O'Connor
Sen. Lydia Edwards
Sen. Jason Lewis
Sen. Liz Miranda

cc:

Patrick Tutwiler, Secretary of Education

Jeffrey Riley, Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education