

MassSenate

An Act to Build Resilient Infrastructure to Generate Higher Education Transformation

S.2962

Fact Sheet & Highlights

An Act to build resilient infrastructure to generate higher-ed transformation, known as the BRIGHT Act, will enable Massachusetts' public higher education campuses to repair aging infrastructure, modernize lab and research space, and plan for the future through development of unused property.

The legislation authorizes up to \$3.28 billion in borrowing, with \$2.5 billion marked specifically for maintenance, repairs, and major capital projects to address billions of dollars in deferred maintenance awaiting action across the state's 15 community colleges, nine state universities, and five University of Massachusetts campuses.

Details of the legislation are below.

Investing in Public Higher Education Campuses

Authorizes Bonds for Higher Ed Projects. Allows the state to issue up to \$3.28 billion in special obligation bonds to support public higher education capital projects, including:

- \$1.25 billion for projects on **state university and community college** campuses;
- \$1.25 billion for projects on **University of Massachusetts** campuses;
- \$120 million to support well-equipped **laboratories** at public higher education institutions, modern facilities to foster **career-oriented** collaboration between community colleges and vocational technical schools, and **health facilities** to promote students' wellbeing;
- \$100 million toward the creation of **housing and mixed-use developments** on campus properties;
- \$100 million to advance **regional economic and workforce development** through a competitive grant program for equipment and facilities for career technical education and training programs;
- \$275 million for the **Mass. College of Art and Design**'s Tower Building, where 'high priority critical repairs' are needed;
- \$80 million for campus **energy efficiency and decarbonization**;
- \$50 million for a competitive grant program for **capital improvements** at public higher education campuses, including climate resilience upgrades;
- \$30 million for campus **master planning**; and
- \$20 million for **technology improvements** that support students and facilitate remote and hybrid learning.

Backs Up the Bonds. Utilizes 'Fair Share' revenue to back the borrowing and enable the state to finance these higher ed capital projects. Creates a new Commonwealth Public Higher Education Capital Projects Fund, mirroring the model of the successful Commonwealth Transportation Fund, which can be used to cover payment of debt service on state bonds issued for public higher education purposes. The fund would be credited annually with \$125 million in funding from the 'Fair Share' surtax on high-earning households.

Responsibly Managing Campus Projects

Allows Nimble Oversight. Creates flexibility for structural or mechanical projects with an estimated cost of less than \$10 million by allowing the Commissioner of Capital Asset Management and Maintenance to delegate supervision to the Massachusetts State College Building Authority (MSCBA). For building projects with estimated construction costs below \$500,000, removes a current restriction on the selection of a provider of design services.

Prioritizes Cohesive Planning. Ensures deliberate, coordinated planning by requiring that projects initiated by the MSCBA be consistent with a state university or community college's campus master plan.

Calls For Timely Data. Provides transparent data by requiring an annual report on capital expenditures for public higher education, which would be filed with the Legislature by December 31 each year.

Helping Higher Ed Campuses Move Forward

Encourages Development of Unused Property. Supports campuses and the surrounding communities by creating a streamlined process for public higher education institutions to sell off or lease surplus land. Allows for the disposal of real property if the chancellor or president has determined it is surplus to their institution's current and foreseeable needs, subject to approval of the higher education commissioner. Provides an accountable check by giving an institution's board of trustees 60 days to disapprove of the surplus determination. Invests in the future by depositing the proceeds of any sale or lease into the new Commonwealth Public Higher Education Capital Projects Fund.

Updating the State College Building Authority. Modernizes the composition of the Massachusetts State College Building Authority. Removes an outdated requirement that six of its board members cannot have graduated from a state college. Adds two non-voting members, one of whom is a president of a state university or a designee, and the other a president of a community college or a designee.

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