



MASS WORKFORCE ASSOCIATION
ONE SYSTEM – ONE VOICE

June 12, 2023

The Honorable Aaron Michlewitz, Chair, House Ways and Means
The Honorable Michael J. Rodrigues, Chair, Senate Ways and Means
The Honorable Ann-Margaret Ferrante, Vice Chair, House Ways and Means
The Honorable Cindy F. Friedman, Vice Chair, Senate Ways and Means
The Honorable Todd M. Smola, Ranking Member, House Ways and Means
The Honorable Patrick O'Connor, Ranking Member, Senate Ways and Means

Dear Chair Michlewitz, Chair Rodrigues, Vice Chair Ferrante, Vice Chair Friedman, Ranking Member Smola, and Ranking Member O'Connor:

On behalf of our members, we write to express our appreciation for the many investments in job training, adult education, skill development, career pathways, apprenticeship, and other industry sector partnerships in the FY24 budget.

The Massachusetts Workforce Association (MWA) is a statewide membership association that leads, advocates, and convenes on behalf of the state's workforce development system. MWA provides a unified voice for the state's regionally-led workforce development system to ensure it is responsive to the dynamic demands of businesses, job seekers, incumbent workers, and youth throughout the Commonwealth.

As the conference committee deliberates to create a final FY24 budget, the funding recommendations below will provide the strongest support for workforce development in the FY24 budget:

- **MassHire Career Centers (7003-0803):** *MWA supports the House appropriation of \$15 million for operation of the MassHire Career Centers.* The MassHire Career Centers, located in every region throughout the Commonwealth, are the "front door" of the state's workforce development system. Located within the 16 MassHire Workforce regions, Career Centers serve as a vital link between job seekers and businesses to bring about economic opportunity for residents and employers alike. The legislature's investment in MassHire Career Centers since the pandemic began has critically improved the system's crucial infrastructure and service delivery. This funding supports more than 110 FTEs across the state and is the only flexible workforce funding the system receives through the state budget.
- **Advanced Manufacturing (7002-0020):** *MWA supports the Senate appropriation of \$3 million for a manufacturing program administered by the Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development.* This program supports four regional consortiums focused on meeting local manufacturers' needs through a fully coordinated manufacturing training system across the state. In addition, the training focuses on those who are unemployed, underemployed, and underrepresented populations including veterans, minorities, and women. Despite the pandemic, manufacturers around the state are still seeking skilled workers to maintain their competitiveness. These state dollars will help Massachusetts be prepared for federal CHIPS Act investments in local manufacturing supply chains.



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- **School-to-Career Connecting Activities (7027-0019):** *MWA supports the House appropriation of \$9M for Connecting Activities.* Designed to promote career readiness activities and generate employer-paid work experiences for high school students, Connecting Activities supports students in programs across 188 urban, suburban, and rural high schools, connecting schools and employers in every region of the state. The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) is leading the effort to significantly expand student awareness of and preparation for careers through Early College and Innovation Pathways, as well as expansion of CTE Pathways. All three pathways are required to incorporate career exploration and work-based learning to help students make the connection between their coursework and the world of work. Connecting Activities provides funding through the state's MassHire Workforce Boards for the staff who prepare students and engage employer partners. This is the infrastructure that makes high school career pathways possible.
- **YouthWorks (7002-0012):** *MWA supports the House appropriation of \$31 million for YouthWorks.* YouthWorks is a proven model to help teens and young adults get the skills and experience needed to find and keep jobs. By expanding job opportunities for young people, and supporting them in acquiring the skills they need in the workplace, YouthWorks is part of a system creating a pipeline of skilled workers for employers throughout Massachusetts. In FY23, the legislature increased the age of young adults who can be served from 14-21 years to age 25. This program expansion requires additional resources in order to develop new employment and training partnerships, and deepen existing relationships.

In addition, we appreciate both House and Senate commitments to funding early education and child care. While this has long been a barrier to participation in training programs and employment, the issues around access, affordability, and quality of child care were exacerbated by the pandemic. We support full and generous funding for this vital sector of our economy.

Our Commonwealth is experiencing one of the tightest labor markets in recent history while businesses are desperate for skilled workers. During tight labor markets, the jobseekers that our public workforce system serves are some of those with the greatest barriers to economic mobility and success. We must be intentional with investments and policies to ensure just and equitable access to training and workforce development programs and supports. Thank you for your partnership and support of the state's workforce development system. Please do not hesitate to contact us at any time if you have any questions or need additional information.

Sincerely,

Raija Vaisanen
Executive Director
Massachusetts Workforce Association