



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
MASSACHUSETTS SENATE

SENATOR EDWARD J. KENNEDY

First Middlesex District

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July 13, 2021

The Honorable Ann Gobi, Senate Chair
The Honorable David Rogers, House Chair
The Joint Committee on Higher Education
Massachusetts State House
Boston, MA 02133

Dear Chairwoman Gobi and Chairman Rogers,

I appreciate the Joint Committee on Higher Education considering Senate Bill 841, An Act investing in public higher education. This legislation takes a meaningful step towards recognizing the value of adjunct faculty to our public higher education landscape by expanding their access to health care benefits, which many adjunct faculty members at our public institutions are currently not eligible for.

At state universities, community colleges and University of Massachusetts campuses, a substantial portion of campus faculty is comprised of adjunct instructors. In my district, The University of Massachusetts Lowell employs at least 475 adjunct faculty members, representing roughly 45 percent of the teaching staff on campus, according to the adjunct faculty union. While the exact percentage of courses that are taught by adjuncts fluctuates and is difficult to estimate precisely, these statistics, and similar figures at other campuses, make it irrefutable that our public higher education system is dependent on the talents of adjunct faculty and that these part-time instructors contribute considerably to the educations of students enrolled at public institutions.

As this Committee is aware, a significant majority of graduates from public institutions remain in Massachusetts after earning degrees. According to an annual report on performance indicators published by the University of Massachusetts President's office in 2018, nearly three quarters of graduates of the system stay in Massachusetts. These graduates form the foundation of our Commonwealth's economy, filling jobs in key sectors and advancing Massachusetts industry as entrepreneurs and innovators.

We increasingly rely on adjunct faculty to ensure that our students are prepared participate in our state's economy and civic life in a meaningful way. Despite adjuncts dutifully fulfilling this vital role on each one of our public campuses, they are often not able to access the same benefits as other workers. In particular, because of the atypical nature of the work schedules of adjuncts, these instructors are often not eligible for employer-based health insurance.

S841 would address this glaring inadequacy by expanding access to health insurance under the Commonwealth's Group Insurance Commission to include faculty that teach two three-credit courses in a semester, or four courses in an academic year. This bill stipulates that the Commonwealth, not the intuitions of higher education, shall bear the associated costs, a relatively modest investment when we consider their collective value.

This bill, if enacted, will serve as a reflection of our acknowledgment of the critical role that adjuncts play in our public higher education system, and by extension our Commonwealth as a whole. It will provide a well- deserved benefit to hard working adjuncts and will strengthen the caliber of instruction they are able to provide and thereby elevate public higher education at every level. For these reasons, I hope that you join me in supporting this legislation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Ed Kennedy", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Sen. Edward J. Kennedy
First Middlesex District