

January 19, 2022

Dear Chairman Lesser, Chairman Cutler, and Members of the Future of Work Commission,

On behalf of the Massachusetts Business Coalition on Skills (MBCS), we urge the Future of Work Commission to recognize and include policy recommendations in its forthcoming report that will expand access for learners and jobseekers to earn industry recognized credentials in the future.

The MBCS is a coalition of 27 diverse business organizations from across the state that advocates for equitable skills development policies. Among member organizations, the Massachusetts Business Roundtable is represented on the Future of Work Commission as a member and the Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education presented to the Commission in late 2021. As expressed by these groups and shared by MBCS in past testimony to the Legislature's Labor & Workforce Development Committee, we see firsthand the challenges employers across the Commonwealth experience today in filling open positions with employees that possess the skillsets required for employers to run or expand their businesses successfully.

We must plan today to develop tomorrow's future. That is why we recognize the significant potential we can unlock by investing in our students. Students today want and deserve access to career-connected study, yet our current high school system limits this educational experience. Thoughtful policy recommendations that can be implemented today to yield success for our future – including our future talent – is critical to maintain the Commonwealth's competitiveness in the coming years.

The MBCS encourages the Future of Work Commission to incorporate in its policy recommendations legislation (H.691/S.351) focused on expanding high school access to earn industry recognized credentials. These bills will expand opportunities for high school students today and in the coming years to earn industry-recognized credentials tied to labor market demand and high-wage jobs of the future. Building on these bills in the Future of Work's recommendations will integrate education and career, adopting strategies that will make industry-recognized credentials more accessible to high school students and build career aligned high school pathways to good jobs or higher education. This strategy helps to also close the skills gap, ensuring that the education our students receive align with the skills needed to be successful in the workforce.

Currently, Massachusetts has low alignment between the credentials earned by high school students and the credentials in demand among employers. This is troublesome because the state's employers report that one of the clearest indicators of whether a high school graduate will be hireable in the future is if they possess an in-demand industry-recognized credential(s). The Future of Work Commission has heard from presenters and has discussed the important role employers must play in building our future talent, and public policy such as expanding access for high school students is a key strategy that will align labor market demands with improved skills in the future.

As the Commission considers public policy recommendations, we urge consideration of expanded industry-recognized credentials for high school students because it offers a dynamic solution to closing the skills gap by annually prioritizing industry-recognized credentials with high employment value that are recognized by higher education institutions and respond to changing regional labor market demands. In turn, the prioritized industry-recognized credentials can guide students toward high-wage and in-demand careers while also assisting employers in their efforts to identify job candidates that possess the skills needed to succeed.

Investing in and fostering the talent of our future workforce will keep Massachusetts a global competitor and create new opportunities for residents and businesses alike. We strongly encourage the Commission to consider data-driven efforts to expand access to industry-recognized credentials, like the one outlined in H.691/S.351, and other policy efforts that will work to close the skills gap, address labor market demands, and provide students with career pathways toward high-wage and in-demand jobs.

Thank you for your consideration. The Coalition looks forward to being a resource to you as the Future of Work Commission develops its set of recommendations and report.

*Massachusetts Business Coalition on Skills*

- 1Berkshire
- Amplify Latinx
- Bedford Area Chamber
- Better Business Bureau Serving Eastern MA, ME, RI & VT
- Black Economic Council of Massachusetts
- Blackstone Valley Chamber
- Cape Cod Chamber
- Greater Boston Chamber
- Kendall Square Association
- MassTLC
- Massachusetts Association of Insurance Agents
- Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education
- Massachusetts Business Roundtable
- Massachusetts State Automobile Dealers Association
- Massachusetts Taxpayers Foundation
- Nashoba Valley Chamber
- Neponset River Regional Chamber
- Newton-Needham Regional Chamber
- North Central Massachusetts Chamber
- North Shore Chamber
- One SouthCoast Chamber
- Quincy Chamber
- Retailers Association of Massachusetts
- Somerville Chamber
- Springfield Regional Chamber
- Western Massachusetts Economic Development Council
- Worcester Regional Chamber