

## **UMass Tuition Freeze Hinges On Budget Talks**

By Katie Lannan – State House News Service

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The University of Massachusetts could freeze tuition and fees for in-state undergraduate students next year, a UMass official said Monday, if lawmakers agree to a \$26 million funding increase. Otherwise, a fifth consecutive year of tuition hikes could be on the horizon. Lisa Calise, senior vice president of administration and finance at UMass, presented the university's fiscal 2020 funding request to legislative budget writers during a meeting at Bristol Community College. The five-campus system is requesting \$568.3 million, which Calise said would represent a \$26.2 million increase over fiscal 2019.

“UMass has worked to maintain a low cost per student, and we will be able to do so by freezing tuition for in-state undergraduates if our FY '20 budget request is fully funded at \$568.3 million,” Calise told the Joint Ways and Means Committee. “Without full funding of that budget request, the university will need to implement modest and reasonable tuition increases for FY '20.”

Calise called the request “an attempt to mitigate tuition increases.” She said nearly \$12 million would fund collective bargaining increases and the remainder would go toward fixed costs, including financial aid.

In his budget request, Gov. Charlie Baker funded the UMass line item at \$558 million. Responding to a question from Rep. Hannah Kane, Calise said the state appropriation in fiscal 2019 covered approximately 22 percent of the university's \$3.4 billion overall budget. UMass in 2018 raised its tuition 2.5 percent for in-state undergraduates, or an average \$351 per student, marking the fourth straight year of tuition hikes for UMass students after a two-year freeze that ended in 2015. Out-of-state tuition went up 3 percent, or an average \$938 per student.

When UMass trustees approved the 2.5 percent bump last July, the Public Higher Education Network of Massachusetts (PHENOM) noted that the increase was smaller than previous years but said it would put “a college education out of reach of thousands more students and families and adds even more debt onto the already massive debt burden forced upon Massachusetts students and families.”

PHENOM on Thursday is hosting an advocacy day at the State House where students from UMass, state universities and community colleges are scheduled to participate in a speaking program and attend more than 100 scheduled meetings with lawmakers to call for passage of two bills related to higher education funding. One of the bills (H 1214/S 741) calls for \$500 million in additional public higher education funding. The bill, known as the Cherish Act, would also

freeze tuition and fees for five years, provided that lawmakers appropriate sufficient money to meet targets spelled out in the bill. UMass President Marty Meehan, whom Calise said could not attend Monday's BCC hearing because of fundraising responsibilities, has said he supports the Cherish Act.

The other PHENOM-backed bill (H 1221), filed by Rep. Natalie Higgins, would establish it as "the policy of the commonwealth to guarantee free public higher education as a right for all residents" Higgins, a Leominster Democrat who serves on the House Ways and Means Committee, asked Higher Education Commissioner Carlos Santiago if increased funding in next year's budget would translate to a drop in student costs at the 15 community colleges and nine state universities.

"We are hopeful that the fees will slow their growth, come down to the extent that's possible," Santiago said.