

# FY 2024 BUDGET RECOMMENDATION BUDGET BRIEF

*Maura T. Healey, Governor | Kimberley Driscoll, Lt. Governor*

## **MassReconnect**

*Amelia Marceau, Fiscal Policy Analyst*

### **Introduction**

The Healey-Driscoll administration recognizes the important role that access to higher education plays in the lives of our residents and the strength of our workforce. For this reason, our FY24 budget recommendation includes \$20 million to launch the MassReconnect scholarship program, supporting residents 25 years and older with free associate degrees and high-quality certificates. This program empowers students to complete their education and pursue training for in-demand jobs across industries, including health care, education, clean energy, advanced manufacturing, and behavioral health.

### **Connect to Workforce Development**

MassReconnect enables individuals who are 25 years of age and older to obtain a degree or certificate through any public community college, creating opportunity for the more than 1.8 million Massachusetts residents in this age group who have a high school diploma or equivalent but no higher education credential.

Statistics from the U.S. Department of Education show that students of color enroll in public higher education at significantly lower rates than their white peers, are burdened with greater unmet financial need, and generally graduate at lower rates. Similarly, low-income students both enroll and graduate at rates below their peers.

MassReconnect reflects an intentional strategy to support those who have been historically underrepresented in higher education, connecting students to the knowledge and skills needed to participate and advance in key industries of the Commonwealth's economy.

### **Eligibility**

MassReconnect will support students for up to four years from initial acceptance or until completion of an associate degree, whichever comes first.

MassReconnect is available to students who:

- Are age 25 or older as of the first day of classes
- Have been a resident of Massachusetts for at least one year
- Have earned a high school diploma or equivalent but have not previously completed a postsecondary degree
- Have submitted a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)
- Are enrolled in 6 or more credits for an associate degree or certificate program at a community college

**What does it cover?**

MassReconnect funds free community college certificates and degrees including all costs related to tuition, fees, books and supplies.

Notably, MassReconnect will cover the Expected Family Contribution calculated in the FAFSA, ensuring free access to public community colleges.

**Dedication to Affordable Higher Education and Student Success**

MassReconnect is part of a broader strategy to make higher education more affordable and attainable throughout the Commonwealth. For example, H.1 proposes to expand MASSGrant Plus financial aid at public institutions of higher education by \$93 million to \$128 million, a 165% increase. MASSGrant Plus provides financial support through grants and scholarships to Pell-eligible undergraduate students who reside in Massachusetts. In addition, students attending Massachusetts public community colleges and state universities may be eligible for additional funding to help with the cost of tuition, fees, and books.

H.1 also includes \$18 million, an increase of \$4 million (29%), for the Community College SUCCESS fund, which awards grants to community colleges to provide wraparound supports and services to improve outcomes for their most vulnerable populations, such as low-income, first-generation, minority, and disabled students and LGBTQ+ students.

For more information, please see the [Historic Higher Education Investments budget brief](#).