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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

April 21, 2016

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Baker Administration, Higher Education Leaders Announce New *Commonwealth Commitment* Plan to Increase Affordability, Drive Degree Completion

*New "2+2" Plan Based on Transfer from Community College to UMass or State U's Will Offer
Per-Semester Rebates, Freeze Costs for Qualifying Students*

LOWELL – Charlie Baker and Lieutenant Governor Karyn Polito joined public higher education leaders today to announce the *Commonwealth Commitment*, an innovative college affordability and completion plan to help more students achieve the dream of a college degree.

The *Commonwealth Commitment* commits every public campus to providing 10% rebates at the end of each successfully completed semester to qualifying undergraduate students, in addition to the standard MassTransfer tuition waiver received upon entering a four-year institution from a Community College. Students who meet the program requirements will, depending on the transfer pathway they choose, be able to realize an average savings of \$5,090 off the cost of a baccalaureate degree.

This plan is the first agreement of its kind in the nation and was signed by University of Massachusetts President Marty Meehan, Worcester State University President Barry Maloney and Middlesex Community College President James Mabry, representing the three segments of the public higher education system, at a ceremony held this morning at Middlesex Community College.

As part of the *Commonwealth Commitment's* goal to increase cost savings and predictability, tuition and mandatory fees will be frozen for program participants as of the date they enter the program. Students will begin their studies at one of the state's 15 community colleges, enrolling in one of 24 *Commonwealth Commitment*/Mass Transfer Pathways programs that will roll out in fall 2016 (14 programs) and fall 2017 (10 additional programs). They must attend full-

time, and must maintain a cumulative GPA of 3.0. After earning an associate's degree in two and a half years or less, students will transfer to a state university or UMass campus to earn a baccalaureate degree.

“This program was designed to decrease the cost of a college degree and accelerate on-time completion for students across the Commonwealth, creating more opportunities and helping more people get into the workforce with the skills they need,” **said Governor Charlie Baker.** “The Commonwealth Commitment will make it even easier for students to go to school full-time and begin their careers with less debt and we are pleased that our higher education officials have worked collaboratively to make this program a reality.”

“The *Commonwealth Commitment* is a win-win for students, employers, and our public higher education campuses,” **said Lieutenant Governor Karyn Polito.** “Our hope is that through programs like the *Commonwealth Commitment*, not only will students get the benefit of a lower cost degree, but also be able to fill more of the high-demand job of the future, including in STEM.”

“The *Commonwealth Commitment* is an important plan which we believe will help move the needle on our administration’s two overarching education objectives: to close the achievement gap and strengthen the global competitiveness of Massachusetts’ workforce and economy,” **said Education Secretary Jim Peyser.** “I thank the leaders of the Department of Higher Education, UMass, and State Colleges and universities for their hard work in reaching this agreement and for their commitment to putting students first.”

“The signing of this agreement represents a new day for our state system of public colleges and universities,” **said Carlos E. Santiago, Commissioner of Higher Education.** “It was not easy or simple to hammer out an agreement among 28 undergraduate institutions with different missions and programs, but I was extremely proud to see how presidents, provosts, faculty and staff worked together with a sense of common purpose to get this done. What unites us is a dedication to students and to the Commonwealth, a realization that when it comes to preparing the state's future citizenry and workforce, our public institutions need to lead.”

“Community college students seeking pathways to an affordable, high-quality, four-year degree will now be able to look to the *Commonwealth Commitment* for critical support – and UMass is proud to be part of this innovative effort,” **said UMass President Marty Meehan.** “This program advances public higher education’s core beliefs and will help to transform lives and strengthen our future. We look forward to welcoming the students who take advantage of this creative initiative to our campuses.”

“The *Commonwealth Commitment* unites the Massachusetts public higher education sector in an energized drive to promote access and success for our diverse communities as we work together to build an educated workforce that will drive the Commonwealth's high-tech community in the 21st Century. Community colleges are proud to play a pivotal role in this strategy,” **said Middlesex Community College President Dr. James Mabry.**

"When we talk about a 'best value' college experience, it doesn't get any better than this," said **Worcester State University President Barry Maloney**. "Those who transfer into state universities under this program will see small classes taught largely by full-time, Ph.D. faculty members who put their students first. The state university degree prepares them well, either for careers or graduate school."

At the end of every successfully completed semester, students will earn a 10% rebate on tuition and fees, payable in the form of a check, or may opt to receive a voucher to use for books or other education-related expenses. The program does not discount room and board, although students may choose to use their *Commonwealth Commitment* savings or other resources to offset some of those costs. Students' rebates or vouchers will be calculated based on the total cost of tuition and mandatory fees at the institutions they choose to attend. Additionally, students who enroll in free or reduced cost dual enrollment programs, taking college courses while still in high school, may be able to apply the credits they earn toward their *Commonwealth Commitment* degrees, thus reducing costs even further.

Further information is available at www.mass.edu/MAComCom
Media toolkit available at www.mass.edu/MAComComKit

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