ATTACHMENT R

July 16, 2021

To the Honorable Senate and House of Representatives:

Pursuant to Article LVI, as amended by Article XC, Section 3 of the Amendments to the Constitution of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, I am returning to you for amendment Section 135 of House Bill No. 4002, “An Act Making Appropriations for the Fiscal Year 2022 for the Maintenance of the Departments, Boards, Commissions, Institutions and Certain Activities of the Commonwealth, for Interest, Sinking Fund and Serial Bond Requirements and for Certain Permanent Improvements.”

Section 135 establishes a task force to evaluate the affordability of public and private higher education options in the Commonwealth.

I am supportive of the intent of this section and continued efforts to improve the accessibility, stability, and quality of higher education in the Commonwealth. However, I believe the scope of the evaluation required by the task force is not reflective of the urgent need to rethink the higher education delivery system. I am instead recommending that the Board of Higher Education (BHE) convene a task force to conduct a focused evaluation of the financing of public higher education in the Commonwealth given current trends in demographics and student enrollment, and to make recommendations for improvement and reform in order to ensure affordability to students, increase rates of on-time college completion, close gaps in degree attainment across demographic groups, and improve alignment with regional and statewide workforce needs.

For these reasons, I recommend that Section 135 be amended by striking out the section and inserting in place thereof the following section:-

SECTION 135. The board of higher education shall convene a task force to evaluate the financing of public higher education in the Commonwealth. The evaluation may include: (i) current and projected trends in student enrollment and demographics; (ii) the financial health and sustainability of higher education institutions in light of demographic changes and competitive pressures; (iii) current cost drivers in higher education and the distinctions between community colleges, four-year undergraduate institutions, and research universities, and between rural and urban campuses; (iv) the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the stability of higher education institutions; (v) approaches to higher education finance and financial aid in other states and their impact on access, completion, and equity; (vi) the extent to which the cost of college is reducing attendance and completion, and increasing the level of student debt; (vii) the potential impact of performance incentives and enrollment-based funding formulas on fiscal stability, workforce alignment, affordability, and student outcomes.

The task force shall consist of the commissioner of the department or his designee, members of the board, representatives from Massachusetts public colleges, one or more students currently enrolled in a public college, and outside experts. The task force shall present its findings and recommendations to the board of higher education, and the board shall file a report of its evaluation to the joint committee on higher education and the house and senate committees on ways and means by June 30, 2022.

Respectfully submitted,

Charles D. Baker

 Governor