

Good afternoon. My name is Jeremy Thompson. I am the Director of Higher Education for Service Employees International Union Local 509, or SEIU 509. On behalf of SEIU 509's nearly 20,000 members, I want to thank the Special Commission on Interstate Reciprocity Agreements for giving me this opportunity to testify before it today.

SEIU 509 represents human service workers and educators throughout Massachusetts. Our members work for state social service agencies, private-sector human services providers, and universities. They also work as small business owners, providing family child care and clinical mental health counseling. While the industries and occupations in which SEIU 509 members work are diverse, most need some kind of postsecondary education -- certification, licensure, or a degree. Moreover, many of them *serve* people -- clients, students, patients -- who have, or are seeking, or will seek, some kind of postsecondary credential.

SEIU 509 members have a particular interest in seeing Massachusetts maintain and enforce quality standards and consumer protections that befit the birthplace and capital of U.S. higher education.

Online higher education is exploding nationally: while general student enrollment in higher ed was flat from 2012 to 2014, student enrollment in online higher ed programs increased 15% over the same period.

The number of online higher ed program offerings has increased 72%. That includes a 95% increase in the number of certificate programs.

Over 600 colleges and universities have introduced online programs since 2012 -- a 34% increase in just 3 years.

At the same time, online higher ed is imploding. The predatory marketing and lending practices of Corinthian Colleges and ITT Tech led to their closures, and have left tens of thousands of students scrambling to complete their studies, and have put taxpayers on the hook for hundreds of millions of dollars in discharged student loans. In 2014, these two companies alone had enrolled over 60,000 students combined in online courses.

While the crackdown, and ultimate shutdown, of these for-profit higher ed companies was welcome news, there remain dozens of other higher-ed corporations, driven purely by profit, who would love nothing more than to gain access to a national market of potential online student customers.

They must be especially eager to expand their reach into Massachusetts, which they could do much more easily if Massachusetts were to enter into the State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement, or SARA. Health care, education and information technology aren't just key industries in Massachusetts. They are also among the top fields that drive online higher ed enrollment in the state. The promise of a credential that can help someone get a job in one of these sectors is alluring indeed, but ask Corinthian and ITT Tech students how it turned out for them.

The state budget language that created this commission maintains the Attorney General's *general*

consumer protection authority under Chapter 93A in the event that Massachusetts joins SARA, and that's important. However, it is not clear that the state Board of Higher Education's specific power to revoke a college's or university's degree-granting authority under Chapter 69, Section 30A, would remain intact if Massachusetts joins SARA.

SEIU 509 represent thousands of faculty in Massachusetts -- many of whom teach online, and do it well. Our members are all about quality teaching and learning. So I want to end my remarks by turning briefly from for-profit higher ed corporations to the many *non*-profit colleges and universities in Massachusetts. As tuition-dependent teaching institutions, many of these schools are under tremendous pressure to figure out how to survive, let alone grow, in the 21st century. One strategy many of them seem to have hit upon is online education, especially graduate online ed. Unfortunately, some of the fastest-growing online higher ed institutions in Massachusetts are those that currently serve students the most poorly.

Dean College saw online enrollment grow 1100 percent from 2012 to 2014. Its 6-year graduation rate is 48 percent.

Fisher College saw online enrollment grow 160 percent. Its 6-year graduation rate is 37 percent.

Becker College's online enrollment grew 68 percent. Its 6-year graduation rate is 29 percent.

At these 3 schools, 12-15 percent of students default on their federal loans within 3 years of leaving.

By entering into SARA, Massachusetts would not only potentially ease the path for irresponsible actors to come into the state. It would also give its own colleges and universities more opportunities to serve a national market. For schools that are doing right by students already, this could be a chance to enhance the state's higher ed brand.

For schools like Dean, Fisher and Becker, however, such expanded access threatens to tarnish that brand. Instead of being allowed to serve more students across the country, it's clear that these non-profit institutions, and others with similarly troubling performance records, should instead be held accountable for grossly underserving the students they enroll presently.

Thank you.