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## Testimony of American Student Assistance on H. 3604 (An Act relative to online education for high school students for college credit)

American Student Assistance (ASA), a Massachusetts non-profit committed to helping kids know themselves, know their options, and make informed choices to achieve their education and career goals, would like to support H.3604 (an Act relative to online education for high school students for college credit). This legislation would establish a study of online dual enrollment opportunities in Massachusetts, which are crucial programs to ensure high school students across the Commonwealth have equal access to the benefits of early exposure to college-level coursework.

ASA has a 60-year legacy of working directly with students to increase their access to education beyond high school and help them pursue their education and career dreams. We want to see kids make more informed and deliberate choices about their higher education path, based on their own unique skills, interests and passions. Currently, too few students in our Commonwealth are successfully navigating a path through post-secondary education and on to a career. In fact, only 58 percent of students graduate from a Massachusetts public four-year college or university “on-time” (that is, within six years for a four-year school), and according to the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education, for the first time in modern history, the overall rate at which our state’s students earn college degrees will turn from growth to decline by 2022 if college completion rates persist at their current pace.<sup>ii</sup>

To successfully execute on a plan for college and career, students must have early opportunity to explore and experiment in different areas of study so they can uncover their own natural aptitudes. Dual enrollment allows high school students to get a head start on investigating academic subjects and disciplines more deeply at the collegiate level, which not only increases their chances of enrolling in and ultimately completing post-secondary education, but also saves them money along the way by awarding them advance college credit and potentially shortening time to college graduation.<sup>iii</sup>

But despite dual enrollment’s many benefits, multiple barriers abound and access across our state is not equal for all students. Students must often travel to a college campus to take classes, which poses a problem for students living in rural communities where a local college may be out of reasonable driving distance (particularly for a high school student who does not have access to their own vehicle) and public transportation options are limited. Cost can also be a roadblock. While the Commonwealth Dual Enrollment Partnership provides funding for a student’s first dual enrollment class, tuition and fees for subsequent courses are set by the individual higher education institutions.<sup>iv</sup> Books, supplies and transportation are also additional costs that families may have to cover. Online learning, however, can be one solution. Dual enrollment providers can leverage digital technology to help alleviate the costs associated with providing instruction, as well as offer students with limited transportation options a convenient method of class participation. To ensure online dual enrollment classes retain the same high-level quality and rigor as those provided in-person, we strongly endorse the legislation’s requirement that the proposed study include analysis of standards utilized by other state governments where online dual enrollment may be more prevalent. We should take every opportunity to learn best practices and expand our understanding of optimal dual enrollment implementation.

Dual enrollment is a key strategy to ensure greater college and career readiness among Massachusetts students. Together with the bill S. 304 (an Act to expand dual enrollment for high school students in Gateway Cities), which ASA endorsed earlier this month, H.3604 will increase the likelihood that more students across our Commonwealth will get a leg up on aligning their college plans with their long-term goals, persist to college completion and embark on successful careers as a vital part of the Massachusetts workforce. We urge you to vote this bill out of committee.

<sup>i</sup> The Chronicle of Higher Education. College Completion: Graduation Rates by State. Retrieved from [https://collegecompletion.chronicle.com/state/#state=ma&sector=public\\_four](https://collegecompletion.chronicle.com/state/#state=ma&sector=public_four)

<sup>ii</sup> Massachusetts Department of Education. (June 2016). The Degree Gap: Honing in on College Access, Affordability & Completion in Massachusetts. Retrieved from <http://www.mass.edu/visionproject/documents/2016%20The%20Degree%20Gap%20-%20Vision%20Project%20Annual%20Report.pdf>

<sup>iii</sup> U.S. Department of Education. *FACT SHEET: Expanding College Access Through the Dual Enrollment Pell Experiment*. Retrieved from <https://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/fact-sheet-expanding-college-access-through-dual-enrollment-pell-experiment>

<sup>iv</sup> Massachusetts Department of Higher Education. Commonwealth Dual Enrollment Partnership. Retrieved from [https://www.mass.edu/strategic/read\\_cdep.asp](https://www.mass.edu/strategic/read_cdep.asp)