



# MASSACHUSETTS ADVOCATES *for* CHILDREN

## **An Act Creating Higher Education Opportunities for Students with Intellectual Disabilities, Autism Spectrum Disorders, and other Developmental Disabilities**

**HD456** (Rep. Haddad, Rep Garballey) – **SD931** (Sen. L'Italien)

These two bills allow persons with intellectual disabilities (ID) and persons with autism to access our state colleges and universities in order to gain skills necessary to work and live independently in the community as adults.

- In 2007 the Massachusetts legislature launched a groundbreaking grant program called *Inclusive Concurrent Enrollment Initiative (ICEI)*, giving a small fraction of our state's young adults with ID and autism the opportunity to participate in state colleges and universities. In 2014 a Higher Education Task Force composed of legislators, higher education leaders, education experts, and state officials reviewed the *ICEI* grant program and other statewide and national opportunities for individuals with ID or autism.
- In its report to the Massachusetts legislature, the Higher Education Task Force found that “hundreds of youth with severe disabilities have been successfully included in Massachusetts college campuses.”<sup>[1]</sup> Individuals with ID and autism were able to access higher education by completing inclusive credit and noncredit college courses related to their career goals and by participating in the life of the campus, and as a result they made significant progress towards their education and career goals.
- The Higher Education Task Force report concluded that higher education provides an important pathway to integrated competitive employment and independent living for individuals with ID and autism. Similarly, national research data indicate that forty percent of adults with ID who attended college were able to find paid employment, compared to an employment rate of sixteen percent for those who did not.
- These two bills implement Task Force recommendations by removing barriers that currently preclude many persons with ID and autism from participating in higher education. Individuals with ID and autism who are unable to pass MCAS and who do not obtain a regular high school diploma would be able to enroll in courses with their nondisabled peers and would be able to participate in extracurricular activities and other aspects of campus life, with supports and services to facilitate inclusion.
- The bills allow state colleges and universities to establish guidelines governing admission as well as course selection and enrollment. Supports and services to facilitate inclusion could be provided by the Department of Developmental Services (DDS), the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC), the student's local school district, or private funding.
- These bills would require that the goals, mission statements and performance measures of our state colleges and universities provide for the inclusion of students with ID and autism, and would also address steps to support inclusive dormitory living.
- These bills would also codify the *ICEI* grant program and allow the special education process to consider higher education as an option for students with disabilities who are 18 to 22 years old.

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[1] The report of the Task Force, entitled *Task Force on Higher Education for Students with Intellectual Disability and Autism Spectrum Disorder: A Report to the Massachusetts Legislature* (April 2014), may be found online at: <http://massadvocates.org/wp-content/uploads/Higher-Ed-Final-task-force-report-4-14-2.pdf>