

Joint Committee on Higher Education Plans to Resubmit Bill Establishing a Review Commission During Upcoming Legislative Session

Lucas McDiarmid, communications director for State Senator Anne Gobi's office, said the Legislature's Joint Committee on Higher Education will resubmit [a bill that would establish a Higher Education Review Commission](#) during the 2023-2024 legislative session.

Gobi, the Senate Chair of the Committee did not respond to further requests for comment.

If established, the Higher Education Review Commission would address concerns brought up by previous bills, including but not limited to: analyzing institutions' cost of attendance, evaluating adjunct to full-time faculty ratios and streamlining financial aid programs such as student loan forgiveness.

"What they're contemplating with this commission is seeing whether there are any existing [loan forgiveness] programs here in the Commonwealth," Betsy Mayotte, founder and president of [The Institute of Student Loan Advisors](#), said. "And if not, should there be? I know it is something that is being discussed as a potential priority for some of our state legislators."

Katherine Asselin, a college sophomore and native of Littleton, MA, hopes the bill will pass and that the Review Commission will prioritize addressing student loan forgiveness and the increasing rate of college tuition.

"A statewide student loan forgiveness program in Massachusetts would be amazing," Asselin said. "I know that paying off my student loans will be a prominent issue on my mind after I graduate, and will compound with other financial pressures. Rising tuition and attendance costs is a serious issue, especially because the rate at which they are increasing is not concurrent with inflation and rising family incomes."

While Asselin expects to receive aid from President Biden's Student Debt Relief Plan, she said a more localized program would further ease her worries. First-generation college student and native of Fall River, MA, Willow Torres shares her sentiments.

"A statewide loan forgiveness program would, in all seriousness, be life-changing for me," Torres said. "My mom and I are splitting the cost of my student loans. I worry pretty often about how I will pay my loans back and what the financial burden means for me and my mom."

Mayotte said if the Higher Education Review Commission is established and decides to institute loan forgiveness initiatives, the legislators would have to delineate how their program would or would not interact with the federal plan.

“Student loan forgiveness is very much a political hot potato,” Mayotte said. “Any forgiveness program that this commission might be contemplating would be a state-level forgiveness program. They'd have zero influence over any type of federal forgiveness program.”

The loan forgiveness component of the bill originates from a previous resolution proposed in the House. In March 2021, [Representative James Arciero](#) along with fellow representatives [Marcos A. Devers](#) and [Patrick Joseph Kearney](#) submitted a bill proposing the creation of a student loan forgiveness program.

In April 2022, this act and ten other bills were combined into an act to establish a Higher Education Review Commission where it received immediate support from over 90 members of the Legislature.

Less than a month later, the Joint Committee Rules recommended the bill ought to pass and referred it to the House Committee on Ways and Means. The act subsequently died following the [end of the legislative session on July 31](#).

The Legislature will reconvene for the new session on Jan. 3, 2023.