Please help reduce the high cost of college textbooks. Support Open Educational Resources (OER) to make college more affordable.

Program is projected to save Massachusetts students $25 million within 10 years.

On behalf of academic and student leaders in the Commonwealth, we urge you to help college students in MA save $25 million by increasing the Massachusetts Dept of Higher Education's Innovation Fund (HEIF), included in Line Item #7066-0025, Performance Management Set Aside, by $2.5 to $5 million in the FY22 budget. The additional funds would support Open Educational Resources, or OERs, within our state.

Open Educational Resources make the cost of college and course materials more affordable for students in Massachusetts. The need for more affordable options available to students is even greater today as we face the hardships of COVID-19 and remote learning.

Open Educational Resources and the Higher Education Innovation Fund

Every year, college becomes more expensive and out of reach for many. Compounding other factors, textbook and other course material costs have increased by 88% over the past decade, often reaching $500 per student every semester. High textbooks costs have led nearly two-thirds of students to skip buying a book, knowing that it will impact their grade. Others instead take on additional work hours, skip meals, and leave bills unpaid to afford their required books, all of which have their own negative impacts on academic success.

To address this growing crisis, many professors are adopting Open Educational Resources, or OERs, to use in their courses. OERs are teaching, learning, and research materials that replace the need for expensive textbooks. They can be released in any medium – digital or physical – and may include full courses, course modules, textbooks, videos, tests, software, and any other tools, materials, or techniques used to support access to knowledge. OERs reside in the public domain or have been released under an open license that permits free access, use, adaptation and redistribution by others with no or limited restrictions.

Open Educational Resources have been shown to increase student achievement within many courses so that they are able to succeed academically and complete their degree on time, all without the cost barrier of traditional commercial textbooks. A small investment in OER saves students many times more. Funding for OER has historically saved students 10 times the amount invested. For example, at UMass Amherst, less than $200,000 in OER grant funding has saved students over $2 million in just 8 years.

OER Grants in the Higher Education Innovation Fund will save students from hardship by:

1. Funding professional development workshops on campuses around the state for faculty to be trained on how to search for and adopt existing Open Educational Resources.
2. Funding grants and stipends that will facilitate the creation of new Open Educational Resources.

Similar grant commitments have been made in CA, NY, GA, and Washington D.C.

Now more than ever, it is critical that we ensure students have access to affordable and accessible options necessary to complete their education. Investing in Massachusetts students will ensure they are able to succeed in their classes and complete their degree, helping both them and our state succeed.

Please support OER grants by ensuring that Line Item #7066-0025, Performance Management Set Aside is funded at $5 million in the final FY22 budget this year. The Higher Education Innovation Fund is included in the Performance Management Set Aside line item. This would be an increase of $2.5 million from the Governor's proposed FY22 budget of $2,552,157.

Sincerely,