



**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF S.821/H.1282
AN ACT BANNING LEGACY PREFERENCES IN HIGHER EDUCATION
BEFORE THE JOINT COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION
JUNE 27, 2023**

The Massachusetts Medical Society (MMS) wishes to be recorded in support of S.821/H.1282, *An Act to banning legacy preferences in higher education*

The Massachusetts Medical Society is a professional association of over 25,000 physicians, residents, and medical students across all clinical disciplines, organizations, and practice settings. The Medical Society is committed to advocating on behalf of patients, to give them a better health care system, and on behalf of physicians, to help them provide the best care possible. The Medical Society recognizes the value and need of a more diverse and representative physician workforce. Medical school and undergraduate admissions are an important component in realizing this necessary workforce transformation. Legacy admissions have been shown to limit social mobility making it harder for disadvantaged students to gain admission.¹ For these reasons, the Medical Society has adopted policy opposing consideration of legacy status in medical school admissions and supporting mechanisms to eliminate its inclusion from the application process such as by encouraging medical schools and other relevant stakeholders to remove any questions on applications pertaining to legacy status.

Legacy admissions are a preference given by an institution to children of alumni and sometimes to applicants of varying relation to alumni.² Legacy admissions date back to the 1920s when they were established to protect universities' white, wealthy, and Protestant applicants from competing with recent European and Jewish immigrants.³ Legacy admissions continue today to significantly favor the admission of white, wealthy, applicants, with nearly 70% of legacy

¹ Moreno C. How ending legacy admissions can help achieve greater education equity: News & commentary C. American Civil Liberties Union. <https://www.aclu.org/news/racial-justice/how-ending-legacy-admissions-can-help-achieve-greater-education-equity>

² Coe DL, Davidson JD. The Origins of Legacy Admissions: A Sociological Explanation. 32 *Review of Religious Research*. 2011;52(3):233-247. 33 https://www.jstor.org/stable/23055549?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents 34

³ Coe, 33.



applicants to Harvard identifying as white.⁴ The practice remains widespread today, with 75% of the nation's major research universities and elite liberal arts colleges - including their medical schools - factoring legacy status into the decision to admit or reject an applicant.⁵ Forty-two percent of private institutions - including most of the nation's elite institutions - use legacy admissions.⁶

The advantage awarded by legacy status can be stark, with one study estimating that legacy status provides an undergraduate applicant with the equivalent of 160 extra points on the SAT and another indicating that legacy applicants are admitted at the rate of more than five times non-legacy applicants.⁷ The University of Arizona College of Medicine, guarantees an interview for legacy applicants, while less than 7% of non-legacy applicants receive one.^{9,10} Physicians' children are twenty-four times more likely to become physicians than their peers, making it the most inherited career requiring higher education.¹¹ Legacy admissions limit social mobility and institutionalize advantages for a privileged few.

S.821/H.1282 *An Act to banning legacy preferences in higher education*, would end the practice of legacy admissions for the University of Massachusetts system and any degree-granting institution of higher education located in the Commonwealth authorized to grant degrees by the

⁴ Arcidiacono P, Kinsler J, Ransom T. Legacy and athlete preferences at Harvard. *Journal of Labor Economics*. 2022;40(1):133-156. doi:10.1086/713744

⁵ Ornstein A. Wealth, legacy and college admission. *Society*. 2019;56(4):335-339. doi:10.1007/s12115-019-00377-2

⁶ Saul S. Elite Colleges' quiet fight to favor alumni children. *The New York Times*. 43 <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/13/us/legacy-admissions-colleges-44-universities.html#:~:text=The%20exact%20number%20of%20schools,public%20schools45%20used%20the%20strategy>. Published July 13, 2022. Accessed September 14, 2022

⁷ Epenshade TA, Chung CY, Walling JL. Admission Preferences for Minority Students, 50 Athletes, and Legacies at Elite Universities. *Social Science Quarterly*. 2004;85(5). 51 https://scholar.princeton.edu/sites/default/files/tje/files/admission_preferences_espensha52de_chung_walling_dec_2004_full.pdf

⁸ Larkin M, Aina M. Legacy admissions offer an advantage - and not just at schools like Harvard. NPR. <https://www.npr.org/2018/11/04/663629750/legacy-admissions-offer-an-advantage-and-not-just-at-schools-like-harvard#:~:text=An%20analysis%20commissioned%20by%20Students,year%20period%3A%20just%205.9%20percent>. Published November 4, 2018.

⁹ Eriksen J. For 'Legacy' Applicants, a First Interview is Guaranteed. College of Medicine - Tucson. <https://medicine.arizona.edu/alumni/alumni-slide/legacy-applicants-first-interview-guaranteed>. Published October 1, 2015.

¹⁰ MD program - applicant profile. University of Arizona College of Medicine. <https://phoenixmed.arizona.edu/applicant-snapshot>.

¹¹ Friedman, S., & Laurison, D. *The class ceiling: Why it pays to be privileged*. Bristol University Press, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv5zftbj>



board of higher education. The State of Colorado has already taken similar action, banning public colleges and universities from using of legacy admissions based on the conviction that providing preferential treatment to students with familial relationships to alumni is discriminatory¹²¹³ While here in the Commonwealth, Tufts University School of Medicine eliminated its use of legacy admissions as part of its anti-racism initiative.¹⁴

Removing legacy from the admissions equation makes a difference. In 2014, Johns Hopkins University removed legacy as a factor in admissions, in efforts to increase its student diversity, and subsequently from 2009 to 2019, Pell Grant eligible students increased by 10%, students on financial aid increased by more than 20% and minority students increased by 10%.¹⁵ Johns Hopkins University attributes ending legacy admissions with building a more diverse student body. Approximately fifteen colleges and universities in the Commonwealth have eliminated legacy from their admissions consideration, including, Amherst College, the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, University of Massachusetts at Boston and Massachusetts Institute of Technology. The Commonwealth should follow the lead of these institutions and eliminate legacy consideration in admissions throughout the Commonwealth, creating a more equitable and diverse higher education system, workforce and leaders of the future.

Thank you for your consideration of our comments and for your important work on this pressing topic. The Medical Society respectfully urges a favorable report on S.821/H.1282 *An Act banning legacy preferences in higher education.*

¹² Jaschik S. Inside higher ed. Colorado bars public colleges from using legacy admissions. <https://www.insidehighered.com/admissions/article/2021/06/01/colorado-bars-public-colleges-using-legacy-admissions>. Published June 1, 2021.

¹³ Jaschik S. Attacking Legacy and Early-Decision Admissions. Inside Higher Ed. <https://www.insidehighered.com/admissions/article/2022/03/14/new-york-bill-would-ban-legacy-admissions-and-early-decision>.

¹⁴ Update for TUSM Community: April 2021. <https://tufts.app.box.com/s/4jgvvq0356isskpk85t8spmva6n6zf6s>. April 2021.

¹⁵ Weissman S. Johns Hopkins ditched legacy admissions to boost diversity – and it worked. *Diverse Issues in Higher Education*. <https://www.diverseeducation.com/home/article/15106230/johns-hopkins-ditched-legacy-admissions-to-boost-diversity-and-it-worked>. Published February 6, 2020.