

# Gov. Healey proposes free community college

By Amanda Keane Worcester

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WORCESTER, Mass. - Many nontraditional community college students have a similar story to Doretta Stoler, a student at Quinsigamond Community College.

“What I really wanted to accomplish was to graduate because I didn’t finish, and I didn’t want to be a dropout,” said Stoler.

Stoler started college right after high school, and then life got in the way. She had kids, she had to work, and her education just kept getting pushed further back. Now more than 10 years later she’s just weeks away from graduating community college with an associate’s degree.

At Quinsigamond Community College, approximately 35% of all students are above the age of 25.

She knows for many other nontraditional students like her and says its finances holding them back for crossing the stage at graduation.

Gov. Maura Healey's office says there are around 700,000 people in the state like Doretta, they have college credits but have stopped short of a degree.

Stoler will soon graduate with a degree in business and it was not an easy path to getting there. It’s the thought of having her two boys ages 12 and 13 see her graduate, that makes it all worth it.

“My kids are going to be there when I graduate they’re going to see me walk the stage and I think it’s really important that they see that I might’ve taken a pause but I finished what I was started,” Stoler said proudly.

Healey asked lawmakers to approve \$20 million for the MassReconnect program in her 2024 budget. This funding will help subsidize those who are 25 and older return to community college to finish their schooling. The money can go towards expenses like tuition, books, fees and housing.

It’s a lot of money, and a hot topic of debate. The way Stoler sees it, even if it can’t help her, it can help people like her. So, it’s money well spent.

“I really hope this program does go through and does get passed for other people,” she said. “It’s going to encourage older people to get back to college and overall it’s going to help our communities. We can bridge that gap.”

Stoler will be continuing her education after graduation pursuing a bachelor’s degree at Nichols College.

The debate on the governor’s budget continues this week in the house where they are starting to sift through more than 1,500 amendments.