

Free community college program stalled by budget negotiations

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WORCESTER, Mass. – Gov. Maura Healey’s “MassReconnect” program to help students 25 and older attend community college for free has yet to be approved because of stalled negotiations over the fiscal year 2024 budget on Beacon Hill.

Community college leaders say this means they have less time to implement the program, launch marketing campaigns and recruit potential students, including re-enrolling people who previously dropped out.

“MassReconnect” has the potential to reach nearly 2 million students who are eligible to receive state aid as they earn a college degree or certificate, but the stalling of the budget could hinder the program.

In the meantime, Quinsigamond Community College VP of strategic enrollment Michelle Tufau Afriyie said the Worcester school is doing what they can to help students who may be eligible for the program.

"So around preparing students to make sure they're eligible, doing the FAFSA, making sure they have access to FAFSA, if they need help that they have access to gaining the assistance they need to complete FAFSA," she said. "We're doing outreach to students who may have no-completed recently, so the state is helping us to do that as well.

"Until we are sure it will pass in the budget, we haven't packaged that money. We have told students this is what you're going to get, and this is how it's going to be free."

According to the department of higher education, if lawmakers do not approve a final annual budget by the start of the fall semester, the department and community colleges could retroactively credit eligible students once the program takes effect through a later budget agreement.