Statement Endorsing the Creation of a Cambridge Student Association

The Graduate Student Council (GSC) of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), which represents MIT’s 6,900 graduate students, fully supports any measure that increases the civic engagement of the MIT community, protects and promotes the voting rights of students, and strengthens student voices in politics. One of the most effective ways of doing these is to collaborate with other student populations with similar interests. The GSC has previously worked with the Boston Federation of Graduate Student Governments to advocate for state-level policy. It is only natural that a similar effort be undertaken at the municipal level. The GSC, therefore, strongly supports the creation of a Cambridge Student Association as described in the below proposal.

Proposal for a Cambridge Student Association (CSA)

Introduction: The CSA Planning Group is a group of graduate and undergraduate students who have come together with the purpose of creating structure for college student representation & involvement in local politics. We are made up of MIT, Lesley, and Harvard affiliates, including several representatives from student governments. Our hope is to create a codified structure for student participation that is sustainable and long-lasting, and that allows students direct communication with the City.

Why Now: Cambridge is a unique city with a large student population that contributes to the economy and culture of the community. Around 11,818 undergraduates and 11,629 graduate students live in Cambridge, making up 29% of the 18+ population. Due to Covid-19, campuses have closed and students have left Cambridge, but students will return in the fall or spring and they will be affected by the impact of the decisions city hall makes around public health and safety. They deserve a voice at the table as the city plans for their return, and a means of communication and advocacy moving forwards.

Precedent: There are several examples of local groups having formal communication and/or membership with a city. SPARK Boston, an advisory group for young adults in the city, serves as an excellent model for this. Members form subcommittees and work during their terms to improve issues like housing, food insecurity, immigration, community connection, and many others. It would be in line with these precedents to create a council for university students, as they make up such a large portion of the Cambridge population, and as the purpose of such councils is to give a voice and an ear to unheard groups.

Mission Statement and Activities: The purpose of the Cambridge Student Association (CSA) is to open a line of communication between students on campus and the City of Cambridge, both to help students in advocating for local student issues and to bring resources and communication from the City directly to the student bodies. Activities for the CSA could take
the form of regular meetings with City Councillors and the Mayor and town-hall style events on university campuses.

Membership/Participants: Undergraduate and Graduate student body representatives are welcome from all Cambridge based-universities including but not limited to Harvard University, MIT, Lesley University, Cambridge College, and Hult International Business School. Our goal is to have at least one representative from each Undergraduate and Graduate cohort that is a member of their student government, or is otherwise elected by a group of their peers. Members will be responsible for outreach to their school communities to understand student needs, and to promptly communicate between their peers and the CSA. We are looking forward to working with the City to finalize a selection process that is fair, representative, and student-driven.

Proposed Timeline: The CSA Planning Group believes it is crucial to begin the CSA in Fall 2020, regardless of whether all students return to campuses. Their feedback will be vital to ensuring a smooth and supportive transition of students back to Cambridge, and would be a good resource for the City in its search to support local businesses and young residents. Our goal is to finalize the CSA proposal in coordination with the City of Cambridge by the end of June, and to formalize and announce the CSA by the end of July, giving the month of August to recruiting the full cohort and scheduling work for the fall semester.

Next Step: Members of the CSA Planning Group hereby request to meet with the Mayor, Councillor McGovern, and any other involved parties to discuss the best means of a codified structure for the CSA.

Prepared by the External Affairs Board on behalf of the MIT Graduate Student Council. July 2020.