

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
MASSACHUSETTS SENATE

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Chair

SENATE COMMITTEE ON
STEERING AND POLICY

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SENATE COMMITTEE ON
INTERGOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

March 29, 2024

Secretary Matthew Gorzkowicz
Executive Office of Administration and Finance
State House, Room 373
Boston, MA 02133

RE: Star Store College of Visual and Performing Arts – Downtown New Bedford

Dear Secretary Gorzkowicz:

I greatly appreciate your time recently to once again discuss my ongoing concerns regarding the Star Store building in downtown New Bedford. The injustice that UMass Dartmouth committed in their decision to abruptly abandon the Star Store College of Visual and Performing Arts must be corrected. As you might remember, my original legislation called for a \$1 transfer of the building and state law I secured in 2022 demands it.

After twenty-three years of expending my own political capital and tens of millions of taxpayer dollars invested into Star Store, this asset must finally be secured for the public's benefit by transferring the property into the hands of a capable non-profit organization that can lead the development into a new and exciting chapter. To maximize the project's economic potential, the non-profit entity must have deep experience in our local culture and history in addition to real estate development. Unfortunately, government bureaucrats squandered a generational gift by failing to capture the Star Store for \$1 at the expiration of the original lease and despite state law directing it to do so. Therefore, Star Store must be transferred to an entity that is free from the sort of bureaucratic inertia and improper influences that derailed the original transfer of the building.

A mixed-use development spearheaded by a public-private partnership will unlock a new wave of economic growth for our downtown at a time when commuter rail is about to launch just a stone's throw away. Opportunities could include an expansion of the arts, the university's law

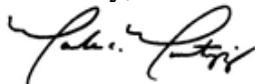
school and legal incubator, housing, and retail. Revitalizing such spaces in our downtown have a proven track record of success. For example, I recently met with the non-profit WHALE, which has protected and restored countless historic treasures in our city including the current Co-Creative Center in the downtown that features a mixed-use of housing, gallery space, coworking units, and retail. Star Store is a perfect place for a similar redevelopment effort.

It is also worth noting that the university failed to spend the entirety of its \$2.7 million legislative appropriation over the last two fiscal years and disregarded that funding as a possible means to spare students the last-minute abandonment of Star Store. Although I secured language in the FY23 closeout supplemental budget to extend this appropriation, students have yet to receive meaningful atonement. Therefore, upon the conclusion of the Inspector General's ongoing review of the Star Store finances, I fully expect that these funds will reach the students who have suffered tremendously.

These students, alongside New Bedford residents, have demanded an immediate resolution by the university to restore the Star Store campus, but university officials have not budged. It is beyond time for decisive action to secure the substantial public investment that has been made and to ensure that the Star Store can continue as a cultural and economic boon for New Bedford. Although I remain open to discussions of what direction is most appropriate, I believe the first course of action must be for the state to fight to have the property transferred back into the public domain. I've been surprised by the lack of action to intervene to protect the students, residents, and taxpayers from the harm that abandoning this building and our investment will have, but I trust that the administration will take decisive action to correct this.

In closing, I look forward to our continued discussions and hope that a transfer of Star Store can commence in the near future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mark Montigny', written in a cursive style.

Mark Montigny
SENATOR