

**Quincy College Winter Commencement Address**  
**January 11, 2014**

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Commissioner of the Department of Public Health  
Commonwealth of Massachusetts

Good afternoon.

I would like to start by first congratulating Mayor Koch on his re-election. You have a Mayor who is committed to public health and I look forward to our continued work together addressing many public health priorities here in the city.

I would also like to acknowledge and thank Maureen Glynn Carroll for inviting me to speak at your commencement ceremony today. Maureen serves on your Board of Governors as just introduced. There are people that cross our paths in life who offer us encouragement and opportunities. We must recognize them and keep them close. Maureen is one of those people in my life who when I took a risk to advance on a statewide platform provided friendship and support. Thank you Maureen!

It is an honor to share this special occasion with all of you at Quincy College. To the students, I congratulate you on your educational achievements. I know firsthand the hard work you all put into your studies, many of you while continuing to work either full, or part-time. To the professors and faculty, I congratulate you on successfully shepherding your students through their many hours of both classroom and homework to complete their curriculum requirements and receive their degrees.

Again, I thank you for inviting me here today to offer some remarks about my personal journey of life-long learning and professional advancement. For many of you it will sound familiar as I took a path similar to yours. I stand before you today as the Commissioner of Public Health for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. I am proud to say I am the first nurse to be appointed to this position. The Massachusetts Department of Health is the oldest and longest serving public health agency in the country and is often recognized as the leader of prevention and health promotion interventions in the United States.

I did not start with a vision or specific direction to strive to attain. I just wanted to graduate from high school and get a job. My first step was to become and LPN, which allowed me to secure a decent and full-time job after a one year program of study. I accepted a position at Yale New Haven Hospital where I could not only develop nursing skills, but could receive tuition assistance and train to become and RN. After reaching this next goal I worked for many years as a clinical nurse and participated in continuing professional education to enhance my skills by attaining accreditation in four nursing specialties.

As I continued to advance I eventually moved from clinical practice to administration and management, a path common for good clinicians. I realized once again I needed to further my academic education to support the new path my career was taking. I chose to get a degree in Health Care Administration at Stonehill College to provide me with the tools necessary to be an effective manager. Armed with both

clinical and business experiences, as well as education, I continually looked for opportunities to advance in leadership roles in the various organizations where I worked. I am convinced my successful career is based on the combination of life-long learning, seeking opportunity, a strong work ethic and a willingness to take risks along the way. I left the comfort of my small community and a secure job to pursue a position at the department of health for the state of Massachusetts and over six years and when an opportunity came around I did not wait to apply for the job I went to my boss and indicated I was interested in being considered and that landed me three promotions and eventually the appointment to be commissioner.

I tell you my story today in hopes that it resonates with you and your future. Today is the first day in the next chapter of your life. Whether you remain employed in your current job or use this as a stepping stone for something new, you will be forever changed by this accomplishment. You have been trained to think more strategically, you have expanded your network of contacts that can open new doors for you, so I urge you to look for the new opportunities this will present in your personal and professional lives. Don't wait for opportunity to seek you out, go forth today with confidence and open eyes to find new paths and set new goals. Volunteer in your communities and at your jobs, even if it is not part of your job duties. Leaders recognize and reward emerging leaders so find ways to demonstrate your skills and strengths.

Quincy College provided you fertile ground to grow. President Tsaffaras continues to insure the founding principles for higher education in Quincy are a priority. With a focus on academic excellence, achievement, diversity, community engagement and economic opportunity, Quincy College supports life-long learning, especially for working adults.

In closing I want to point out that there is strong evidence that education is the most important correlation to good health. Incomes rise with advanced education and income influences quality of life and health status. I wish you all good health in 2014 and best wishes for success however you choose to use your new found knowledge. Go forth, from this day forward, and make a difference not only in your own lives, but for your family, your friends and your workplace.

**CONGRATULATIONS!**