March 16, 2023

Rep. Gene Pelowski
491 State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Chair Pelowski and Members of the House Higher Education Committee:

Thank you for this opportunity.

Ascend at the Aspen Institute is in full support of the Governor's proposal to establish a Student Parent Support Initiative in Minnesota. This endeavor will have many positive returns for Minnesota families. Ascend is a strong proponent of two-generation (2Gen) approaches, those that build family well-being by intentionally and simultaneously working with children and the adults in their lives together. These approaches center the whole family to create a legacy of educational success and economic prosperity that passes from one generation to the next, and the data supports that fact.

Parents who complete a college degree double their incomes, and a parent's level of educational attainment is also a strong predictor of a child's success. A $3,000 increase of their parents' earnings during early childhood yields a 17% increase in a child's future earnings. Investments in postsecondary students with dependent children today will lead to a more economically secure future for Minnesotans.

Since 2018, Ascend's Postsecondary Success for Parents Initiative has been a key driver in building a student parent movement – an expansive, nationally-coordinated effort to advance the development of innovative solutions that provide greater postsecondary access, affordability, and success for parents. We focus on the more than four million student parents enrolled in postsecondary pathways – a group that should inform and strengthen higher education's equity agenda. We work with systems, institutions, and students who are parents to ensure families have access to the resources necessary to achieve their educational goals, ultimately advancing their family's economic mobility and well-being.

Along with provision of significant funding to colleges across the state to support programming for student parents, this grant would support ongoing state efforts. In 2021, Ascend provided a $150,000 grant to the Minnesota Office of Higher Education to rethink public benefits in support of student parent success. This grant supported the state in hiring what is the first-ever (in any state) Whole Family & Student Parent Coordinator. This coordinator oversees planning, research, and development for student parent initiatives on college campuses in Minnesota, engaging in purposeful

collaboration and coalition building with nonprofit organizations, state agencies, and other stakeholders, including student parents, to work toward a shared vision of success for student parents.

That partnership has created a strong scaffolding for support across the state, including the formal launch of the Minnesota Student Parent Alliance, which raises awareness about and increases resources to student parents and their families. This initiative is not in a vacuum – there is a groundswell of interest and support from colleges, philanthropic organizations, and community-based organizations and this funding will be an important catalyst for scaling those efforts.

Ascend is honored to support and learn from leaders in Minnesota. We have 19 Network Partners based in Minnesota, including the Jeremiah Program, Women's Foundation of Minnesota, Raise the Barr, and the Student Parent HELP Center at the University of Minnesota. We also have several Ascend Fellows in Minnesota including Nathan T. Chomilo, Medical Director for the State of Minnesota's Medicaid & MinnesotaCare; Joe Hobot, President of American Indian OIC; Gloria Perez, President & CEO, Women's Foundation of Minnesota; and the Honorable Melvin Carter, Mayor of St. Paul.

We hope that Minnesota continues its trend to be a key state that supports its families to build intergenerational family prosperity and well-being. Support of this initiative is an integral part of those efforts.

Sincerely,

Anne Mosle
Vice President, The Aspen Institute
Founder and Executive Director, Ascend