May 8, 2025

Senator Omar Fateh
Chair Higher Education Finance and Policy
Conference Committee
3219 Minnesota Senate Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Representative Marion Rarick
Chair, Higher Education Finance and Policy
Conference Committee
2nd Floor Centennial Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Representative Dan Wolgamott
Chair, Higher Education Finance and Policy Conference Committee
5th Floor Centennial Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55115

RE: Request for public testimony

Madam Chair, Co-Chair, members of the Committee

Thank you for this opportunity to express concern about the Senate version of the Higher Education Bill, which entirely eliminates state appropriated base funding for the Minnesota Geological Survey. Established by legislative law in 1872, the MGS provides the fundamental Earth science information necessary for stewardship of the state's minerals and groundwater. This appropriation has been in place since 1961 and has remained at its current level since 2011.

The state appropriation is 30% of MGS annual income; zeroing out state appropriation is the equivalent of 7 FTEs for a staff of 30. However, equivalent full-time estimates do not adequately represent the intent of the state appropriation or its impact on the service MGS provides. As an example, in November of 2023, the EPA urged action on nitrate contamination in southeastern Minnesota's drinking water. The state's response to prioritize based on which aquifers are impacted is directly tied to maps and reports provided by MGS and funded by the state appropriation.

The state appropriation transfers institutional knowledge into maps, datasets and reports that have a track record of successful use by private industry, state agencies, and local units of government. It covers administrative and technical support costs for sponsored projects such as the County Geologic Atlases, and matching funds for activities such as mapping for critical minerals. This It also includes the covers costs associated with the education component of County Geologic Atlases and other MGS maps and reports, answering questions of how these products help with local problem solving.

The state appropriation helps save money. Regarding drinking water quality, prevention is far less costly than remediation. Funded by the appropriation, MGS time providing expertise on topics such as nitrate, PFAS and arsenic in drinking water helps answer questions including which aquifers are impacted and which ones are not. Olmsted County staff reported that the Olmsted County Geologic Altas paid for itself many times over simply by providing a site for the county landfill in an otherwise highly sensitive karst landscape. Regarding groundwater quantity, appropriation funding of MGS time on technical advisory committees helps answer questions about aquifer properties, extent and thickness, particularly for site-specific investigations. Is there water available for a given project? Regarding mining, northern Minnesota deposits are valued at billions of dollars, and MGS mapping that provided the foundational information for their discovery was done at a cost of only hundreds of thousands of dollars. Identification of potential critical minerals is also dependent on MGS mapping. A recent report by American Geosciences institute – geologic mapping produces economic returns by a factor of 7 to 10 times initial costs. Forty-nine states have geological surveys - most for over 100 years, providing systematic geoscience information to support stewardship of water, land, and mineral resources.

By design, the legislature established the MGS through state appropriation to be part of the University of Minnesota, to provide unbiased Earth resources expertise, and without a regulatory function. The University provides an academic environment that supports the surveys' mission of mapping and related geologic research and educating the public. MGS also gives university students exposure to practical geological work. This is all consistent with the purpose of a public land-grant university.

Respectfully submitted,

Dr. Robert Tipping
Director
Minnesota Geological Survey

Dr. Anthony Runkel
Lead Geologist
Minnesota Geological Survey

CC: Senator Putnam
Senator Duckworth
Representative Robbins
Representative Coulter