

May 8, 2005

Chair Fateh, Co-Chair Wolgamott, Co-Chair Rarek, and committee members

On behalf of the Minnesota State College Faculty's 4000 instructors, counselors, librarians and coaches, I would like to thank you for your hard work during this legislative session. Your willingness to work with us as we continually strive to meet the needs of Minnesota's diverse student population is truly appreciated.

As you start your work towards a final report, MSCF is grateful to both bodies for your acknowledgement of the success of the North Star Promise scholarship program. For the majority of my 27-year teaching career, we have seen enrollment numbers steadily decline. But thanks in large part to the North Star Promise, that trend is beginning to be reversed. By putting college on the radar of many students who otherwise would not have seen higher education as part of their future, the North Star Promise has opened the doors of our classrooms, labs and shops to students who will go on to meet the critical workforce needs of Minnesota.

MSCF also wants to voice support for the House provision contained in subsection 2(b). We believe addressing tuition in addition to the other variables in the State Grant award formula is a balanced approach to dealing with the current shortfall within the program. Capping award growth to just 1% over the current tuition rate at the University of Minnesota is a step in addressing "high tuition/high aid" model that has been negatively impacting many of our students for years.

On the topic of tuition, MSCF acknowledges that with the lack of new state appropriations, tuition increases are currently being discussed on our campuses. These are difficult conversations between campus administrators, students, and the Minnesota State Board of Trustees. The uncertainty coming out of Washington complicates these conversations and makes determining the "right number" extremely challenging. We ask that you allow these conversations to continue to take place; letting campuses, in consultation with students, strike a balance that will keep costs reasonable while still providing the course offerings and services our students both need and deserve.

Last, we would like to thank the Senate for including the formation of a workgroup to address enrollment fraud found in section 63. Even though enrollment of ghost students is limited to a specific subset of course offerings – courses that are offered as asynchronous online classes with no pre-requisites – as we testified to earlier in session, identifying and removing these "students" prior to the disbursement of financial aid takes significant time and resources away from our faculty's core mission of helping students reach their academic and professional goals. This workgroup will help identify best practices and establish a statewide strategy for combating this fraudulent practice.

Minnesota is fortunate to have a vibrant and diverse higher education landscape. We look forward to continuing to work with you to ensure access and opportunity for Minnesota students.

Respectfully submitted,

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*MSCF is an affiliate of Education Minnesota, the American Federation of Teachers,
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