



Dear Chair Pelowski and members of the House Higher Education Finance and Policy Committee,

Two years ago when the Foster Independence Grant (FIG) legislation passed, granting free college education and funds that cover the full cost of attendance for anyone who has been in foster care in Minnesota, it was a huge win! A win for C2i, furthering our mission in removing barriers Fosters face as they embark on their education and career journeys. But most importantly, this was a huge win for Fosters all across the state. With debt-free education becoming a possibility for young people who have been raised by the counties, we have seen increased numbers in people furthering their education, remaining stably housed, and accomplishing their other goals. We've also seen a fundamental change in young people's outlooks and an increased hope for a thriving future knowing they wouldn't have to enter young adulthood in debt.

However, with a budget shortfall, this grant program could end up with a waitlist affecting up to 40% of applicants. We are finding this possibility out at the same time as the young people we serve, and we are all extremely concerned; we've been fielding calls from people panicking that they won't be able to finish their education, will end up homeless and lose their daycare and general support to survive..

This is not a reflection of their desire or their potential; this is a systemic failure. Two years ago, Gov. Walz and Minnesota's legislature agreed that Fosters deserve better. We celebrated the passage of the bipartisan Fostering Higher Education Act, which has provided a beacon of hope for Fosters that their dreams are now attainable. Together we championed that historic investment in Minnesota Fosters. Yet, once again, we are seeing our State break their commitment.

For two years, the Fostering Independence Grants (FIG) have been used to help Fosters maintain stable housing, reduce work hours, and provide for their basic needs so that they can focus on being students. The introduction of a waitlist is not an acceptable solution. Fosters are way to used to broken promises and false hope, and changes to FIG will cause irreparable harm. The financial uncertainty of a waitlist will cause some students to end their college journey early. It will cause others to not begin at all.

Please do not allow the state of Minnesota to break this commitment, which was only made two years ago. Those students who started college for the first time because of FIG have not even graduated yet. **I am asking for your support to correct the projected shortfall for FIG and allocate funds from the state surplus for funding necessary to support the original legislation.**

Thank you,
C2i Staff



Dear Members of the House Higher Education Committee,

The undersigned utilities and advocates write to express our support and appreciation for the inclusion of section 45 in the Higher Education Omnibus bill before you today. This provision adds the energy sector to the list of industries eligible for the Workforce Development Scholarship Program at Minnesota State.

Already a leading sector for job growth, new energy jobs are expected to accelerate following the passage of significant state and federal policy and spending in the energy sector, including Minnesota’s Carbon Free by 2040 bill and the federal Inflation Reduction Act.

Layering accelerated growth on existing workforce challenges could leave Minnesota without the workforce needed to implement the grid electrification and expansion required by law. The 2023 U.S. Energy & Employment report found that 82% of energy employers reported that it was very or somewhat difficult to fill their open positions, specifically naming small applicant pools, insufficient qualifications, and lack of training as the top 3 reasons for that difficulty in hiring. In addition to difficulties finding skilled workers, 25% of the electric cooperative workforce in MN is eligible to retire in the next 5 years.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics predicts long-term demand for workers in energy roles, with solar and wind technicians predicted to be in the top 15 fastest growing occupations over the next 10 years and electrician demand growing at double the average overall job growth rate. The median hourly wage for all energy workers in the U.S. is also 34 percent higher than the national median for all jobs.

The workforce scholarship program was designed to drive scholarship dollars towards students who pursue jobs in high demand industries and encourage colleges to work with local employers to improve workforce pipelines and leverage state money for additional private investment in scholarships. Utilities operate in every corner of the state and are active members of their local communities, including through significant philanthropic work. The energy industry is well-positioned to work with local colleges to develop workforce pipelines and fund supplemental scholarship awards.

Adding energy to the Workforce Development Scholarship Program will not only support students pursuing high-wage careers in a sector with significant growth and opportunity but also ensure that Minnesota has the workforce needed to reach its energy goals. We are incredibly grateful for your support of this proposal through its inclusion in HF 4024.

Please do not hesitate to reach out to any of the following utilities or organizations if you have any questions or wish to discuss further.

Sincerely,





March 20, 2024

Minnesota House of Representatives
Higher Education Finance and Policy Committee
State Office Building, Room 10
Saint Paul, MN 55155

RE: House File 4024 - Higher Education Policy Omnibus

Dear Chair Pelowski and committee members,

Clean Energy Economy MN (CEEM), Ceres, Clean Grid Alliance [CGA] and the undersigned clean energy businesses, write today in support of the inclusion of the addition of the energy sector as an eligible program of study or certification for the \$2,500 Workforce Development Scholarship within the Minnesota State system included in the Higher Education Policy Omnibus, House File 4024. Investing in policies supporting energy jobs will expand Minnesota's economy and contribute to overcoming the energy efficiency and clean energy sector workforce development challenges. This policy change also invests in the foundation upon how we will achieve carbon-free electricity by 2040.

Today, almost 60,000 Minnesotans work in clean energy jobs, and they grew 50% faster than Minnesota's overall job growth in 2022¹. However, there is still more work to be done to continue improving the equity in the clean energy economy and grow Minnesota's clean energy jobs. The 2023 U.S. Energy & Employment report found that 82% of energy employers have expressed difficulty in hiring. Although Minnesota's clean energy employers are working hard to inspire students of all ages, including creating in-house training opportunities and encouraging career pathways through technical education, they are still experiencing limitations in finding well-trained, qualified, and local people to fill needed jobs.

Including energy as part of the Workforce Development Scholarship Program at Minnesota State schools will allow students to pursue much-needed careers in the energy sector and enable significant economic and job growth opportunities in Minnesota. This will help Minnesota solidify its leadership position in the Midwest as a clean energy powerhouse.

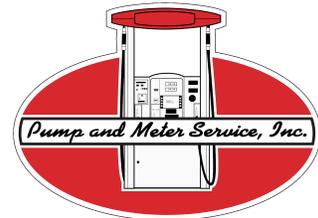
¹ 2023 Clean Jobs Midwest Report: <https://www.cleanenergyeconomy.mn.org/clean-jobs-midwest>

Thank you for the opportunity to share our support for including the energy sector as an eligible program for the Workforce Development Scholarship. If you have any questions, please let us know.

Sincerely,



Design Right Energy, LLC





COUNCIL ON DISABILITY

1600 University Avenue W, Suite 8, St. Paul, MN 55104
651-361-7800 | www.disability.state.mn.us

Honorable Chair Representative Gene Pelowski
House Higher Education Committee
RE: MN RISE Act
March 21st, 2024

Chair Pelowski and members of the House Higher Education Committee,

The Minnesota Council on Disability would like to express our enthusiastic support for section 13 of the HF 4024 DE amendment, the Minnesota Respond, Innovate, Succeed, and Empower (MN RISE) Act, introduced by Representative Hanson. This pivotal legislation addresses critical barriers faced by college students with disabilities, paving the way for a more inclusive and equitable post-secondary educational environment.

Currently, college students with disabilities encounter numerous obstacles that significantly impede their ability to enroll, succeed, and graduate. Notably, approximately 63% of students with disabilities opt not to disclose their condition, thus forgoing vital resources and accommodations. This reluctance is compounded by the lack of clear information on how to access such services and the prohibitive cost and availability of required evaluations. Not getting essential accommodations and supports is the number one reason students with disabilities do not finish their tertiary education.

The MN RISE Act supports students with disabilities through provisions such as expanding the criteria for what constitutes acceptable documentation of disability, ensuring more students can establish their eligibility for accommodations without undue burden. Moreover, it mandates that institutions of higher education develop and disseminate transparent policies regarding disability services, thereby fostering a more supportive and accessible educational landscape.

It should be noted that Subd. 5 of section 7 in the HF 4024 DE amendment is entirely student driven and reflects the experience of real Minnesotan students with disabilities who are currently enrolled in Minnesotan higher education institutions.

The significance of the MN RISE Act cannot be overstated. By eliminating common barriers for students with disabilities, the act not only facilitates greater participation of students with disabilities in higher education but also promotes their acceptance as valued members of the campus community. The envisioned reforms are expected to enhance enrollment, self-disclosure rates, persistence, and completion rates among students with disabilities, contributing to their overall success in their careers.

Thank you for your support for the MN RISE Act.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Trevor Turner".

Trevor Turner
Public Policy Director
trevor.turner@state.mn.us

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David Dively".

David Dively
Executive Director
david.dively@state.mn.us



COUNCIL ON DISABILITY

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Led by Minnesota State University students, we are the inclusive voice for all future, current, and former students. We actively work to represent and support Minnesota State University students and advocate at a local, system, state, and federal level for higher education policies that make a positive impact for our students and communities.

Students United would like to express their full support for the MN RISE Act.