



MINNESOTA STUDENT ASSOCIATION

May 3, 2021

Dear Chair Tomassoni, Chair Bernardy, and members of the Conference Committee,

My name is Sam Parmekar and I am the State Government Director for the Minnesota Student Association, the undergraduate student government at the University of Minnesota - Twin Cities. I write to express our support for the establishment of the Hunger-Free Campus grant program through the Office of Higher Education.

Appropriation

We are pleased to see that both the House and Senate appropriated more than the \$200,000 initially asked for in SF1103. Reducing food insecurity is an urgent charge for every college and university across the state, and as such we respectfully request that the committee adopt the House appropriation of \$275,000 in FY22 and \$223,000 in FY23. Additionally, we ask the Conference Committee to further mirror the House's language by setting \$223,000 as the base annual recurring appropriation for this program in perpetuity.

Designation Criteria

Each version sets out the five criteria that an institution must meet to earn the Hunger-Free designation. Most of these criteria are identical between the House and Senate language, but the Senate version specifically requires that schools notify all students participating in work-study that they may be eligible for SNAP and connect them with resources to apply. Nationwide, 60% of SNAP-eligible students are not enrolled in benefits, largely due to the fact that many students do not know of their eligibility. This year, the University of Minnesota - Twin Cities successfully implemented a SNAP notification program for work-study students, which resulted in 1,800 students being screened and referred to SNAP. We think this is an effective model for increasing SNAP enrollment, and we support adopting the Senate language that codifies it as a Hunger-Free Campus requirement.

Designation Approval

For the University of Minnesota system only, we ask that approval of the Hunger-Free Campus designation be determined by individual campus student associations, in consultation with OHE, rather than the statewide Student Senate. Since individual campuses apply for their own designations, we believe the student leaders on each respective campus are best equipped to assess their own individual needs.

Distribution of Grants

_____ We support the Senate language instructing OHE to prioritize applications for initial grants and applications from schools with a higher number of Pell-eligible students.

Maximum Award

Needs vary greatly between institutions, and the grant amounts established in the current language do not provide enough flexibility for schools to meet their unique needs. We ask that the maximum award amounts be increased to \$10,000 for an initial grant and \$5,000 for a sustaining grant.

Matching Funds

Both versions of the omnibus require schools to provide some form of matching funds in order to receive a grant. While the House language requires a full match, the Senate language requires 25% of the grant to be matched directly or with in-kind funds. We strongly believe that all schools should fully match when able, but we support the Senate's lower matching requirement to reduce barriers to grant money for community, technical, and tribal colleges.

Nutrition is a basic need, and we know that students experiencing food insecurity are less likely to complete their degree than their peers. We would like to thank Chair Tomassoni and Chair Bernardy for prioritizing the Hunger-Free Campus program this session. Food insecurity is a problem that touches every college campus across our state, and it's time for administrators and legislators to step up their efforts to make sure every student has enough to eat.

Respectfully submitted,

Sam Parmekar
State Government Director
Minnesota Student Association