

March 29, 2022

Higher Education Committee
Minnesota House of Representatives

Chair Bernardy and Members of the House Higher Education Committee -

We are writing to express our concerns with HF 4539, a bill to create a Green Training Program at the University of Minnesota.

The University of Minnesota strives to make sustainability a priority for all students, staff, and community members. The importance of including and engaging all members of the University in this type of program is why the Board of Regents adopted a Policy on Sustainability and Energy Efficiency in 2004. Since then each campus has created processes to gather broad input from their whole communities to develop Climate Action Plans and to guide their efforts. This core value is a focus of our strategic plan, MPact 2025. We believe this effort has been successful to date. Sustainability practices are not “in addition” to our work; they are already integrated into how we do our work every day.

House file 4539, unfortunately, would result in a step backwards in our efforts. The legislation proposes to move financial decisions for training from management to a green training program committee that is represented by 50% of the employees already part of the collective bargaining unit. It therefore circumvents the collective bargaining process and procedures in place that the University follows today.

Whether it is food service workers preparing items for food donation, gardeners gathering leaves and other yard waste for composting, or custodians properly handling waste to avoid cross-contaminating materials for recycling and composting, these practices have been in place for many years. Our energy conservation program relies on every person playing a role, from optimization of fan schedules to installing LED lights and asking every person to turn out lights when they leave a space. We provide employees training for these and other sustainability-related activities that are needed to successfully do their jobs.

We view sustainability from the triple bottom line perspective: The people, the environment, and the finances. Our greatest strength of these three is our people. While there is always room to improve how we work, any new investment to support green initiatives would be best targeted to equipment and infrastructure that our well-trained staff can install, operate, and maintain. We encourage the committee to instead strongly consider the University’s sustainability budget request before the committee this session. The University proposal as put forward in HF 4119 will build on our existing work in the sustainability field and meet our MPact 2025 strategic plan goals to demonstrate leadership in sustainability and advance environmental research. We are grateful for the committee’s review of this proposal at the upcoming, March 30th hearing.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide our comments regarding HF 4539.

Sincerely,

Ken Horstman

Ken Horstman
Vice President for Human Resources
University of Minnesota