

Co-Chair Rep. Franson, Co-Chair Rep. Lee, and Members of the House Capital Investment Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony regarding the Minnesota State Academies (MSA) asset preservation request and the Governor's recommendations.

First and foremost, I am a proud alumnus of the Minnesota State Academy for the Deaf and the third of four generations in my family to have attended the Academy. I firmly believe the Academies remain Minnesota's premier educational institution for deaf, deafblind, hard of hearing, blind, and visually impaired students, and I care deeply about their long-term strength and sustainability.

While asset preservation funding is necessary, the broader capital requests and recommendations are flawed in process. Unlike tax-funded public school districts, the Academies do not follow a transparent, community-driven capital planning process. Traditional districts conduct surveys, hold public forums, engage stakeholders, gather buy-in, and require school board vetting and approval before advancing capital proposals. These proposals are presented publicly with clear documentation of need and community support.

The Academies do not follow this model. Capital proposals have historically originated from the Superintendent without comparable public engagement, formal board deliberation, or documented stakeholder support. This longstanding governance practice falls short of the accountability standards expected of publicly funded institutions. Most concerning, the Academies have operated for a significant period without a rolling short- and long-term facilities master plan to guide decision-making. Advancing capital requests without a current, comprehensive facilities plan is not sound public policy.

I respectfully request that the committee direct the Academies to return in the next legislative cycle with:

- A current, board-reviewed facilities master plan
- Documented statewide stakeholder engagement and buy-in
- Demonstrated data supporting enrollment trends and programmatic needs
- Evidence of formal board vetting and approval

Additionally, there must be a data-driven discussion of long-term sustainability. It is reasonable to evaluate consolidating operations onto a single campus in Faribault to improve efficiency and reduce duplication, while also exploring a centrally located satellite residential campus elsewhere in Minnesota to better serve families statewide. These strategies are not mutually exclusive and should be studied together as part of a comprehensive facilities master plan.

The Academies are too important to Minnesota to proceed without transparency, data, and broad community buy-in. I offer these comments not in opposition to the institution, but in strong support of its mission and future.

Thank you for your consideration and your service to Minnesota.

Respectfully,

Sonny Wasilowski

Alumnus, Minnesota State Academy for the Deaf

Past Governor-Appointed Board Member (2011–2019)