

March 28, 2023.

The Honorable Gene Pelowski, Chair
House Higher Education Finance and Policy Committee
491 State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Chair Pelowski and Members of the Committee:

The Undergraduate Student Government at the University of Minnesota- Twin Cities serves over 30,000 undergraduates who make up our student body. We have worked hard this session to have student voices included in conversations about the future of our institution, and we appreciate Chair Pelowski and members of this committee for including us. Our advocacy efforts on-campus and at the Capitol have always focused on supporting student basic needs as the cost of attending college has become unaffordable for many students without accessing the resources that this Higher Education Omnibus bill is including and funding.

According to our campus SERU survey results, 26% of students during the pandemic reported facing food insecurity but during 2022, the number has skyrocketed to 36.9%. Food insecurity is a significant issue on the UMN-Twin Cities campus that has gotten worse as we are coming out of the COVID-19 pandemic. Currently classified as a food desert because of the lack of access to stores that accept SNAP or sell affordable food, we have been working to improve on-campus resources like our food pantries, and funding the appropriation for expanding Hunger-Free Campus would allow for expansion of our food pantries to have better equipment to better serve our students.

Affordability of our public higher education systems is a problem not just faced by our students but all across our state and country. Providing resources like the American Indian scholarship would help reduce the financial burden felt by students, especially those who come from underserved and underrepresented communities.

Working to support student basic needs and addressing affordability through this bill would be the first step toward working to make our public higher education institutions more equitable again for the majority of our students that are struggling now. Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

Siya Sakhardande

Siya Sakhardande, 2022-23 State Coordinator