



April 25, 2022

The Honorable Rena Moran, Chair
449 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd
449 State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Chair Moran and Members of the Ways and Means Committee,

The Office of Higher Education (OHE) staff and I greatly appreciate the courtesy and positive working relationship with Chair Bernardy and the House Higher Education Finance and Policy committee and staff. I want to provide a few brief comments in support of the Supplemental Higher Education bill, H.F. 3872 before the committee today.

I want to first thank the committee for including many of the budget recommendations made by the Governor in his supplemental budget proposal. We especially appreciate including funding to establish the Student Parent Support Initiative. We heard powerful testimony this session from numerous students regarding the unique challenges and barriers they face as student parents working to complete their academic programs, and this budget recommendation helps put necessary and needed supports in place for them.

Although a slightly different approach than was recommended by the Governor, we also appreciate the inclusion of direct operational funds to our Minnesota Tribal Colleges which recognizes their role in our robust higher education landscape in Minnesota.

We also appreciate the attention given to increased appropriations to continue to support and grow our educator workforce through grants to underrepresented student teachers and through the teacher shortage loan repayment program.

We also want to highlight the committee's attention to additional resources needed for the Minnesota State Grant Program. Although the bill does not adopt the Governor's recommended changes to expanded eligibility criteria, any time we have the opportunity to strengthen the State Grant program to increase existing support to current students, or support additional students, we should. I hope that the Governor's recommended changes to state grant eligibility will be considered during conference committee.

One important item I wish was included in the bill from the Governor's revised supplemental budget, is the continuation of the Next Generation Nursing Assistant initiative, which recruited and trained over 1,000 new certified nursing assistants within months. Because the initiative was so successful, the Governor had recommended continuing the initiative with funding to support training of up to 3,000 students per year.

Finally, we appreciate the committee's attention to the overall budget requests of our public higher education systems, and are hopeful that as we progress, we can consider the additional requests made by the Governor to support campus stabilization and equity and affordability initiatives at Minnesota State, and support additional funding for scholarships for students attending Greater Minnesota campuses of the University of Minnesota, as well as supporting enhanced student support services system-wide for the University of Minnesota.

Madam Chair and members, we once again thank Chair Bernardy and the Higher Education Finance and Policy Committee for including many of the Governor's recommended budget proposals in the bill, and look forward to working with the Senate in a conference committee to develop a good final bill that will serve Minnesota students in the ways they have asked, and that they deserve.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Dennis W. Olson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "D" and "O".

Dennis W. Olson
Commissioner

Cc: Representative Pat Garofalo, Republican Lead