



MINNESOTA STUDENT ASSOCIATION

March 22, 2022

Dear Chair Bernardy, Vice Chair Christenson, Lead O'Neill, and members of the Higher Education Finance and Policy Committee,

We are student representatives of the Minnesota Student Association, the undergraduate student government at the University of Minnesota - Twin Cities. We write to express our views on the seat assignment and selection process changes to the Board of Regents in HF 2578. We would like to begin by thanking Representative Schultz for bringing this bill forward and facilitating this timely and important conversation.

The Board of Regents has been disengaged from the University community in recent years. From cutting successful sports teams, who produced an Olympian in the 2020 Tokyo Olympics,¹ to prioritizing the President's salary before student worker pay,² the Board has demonstrated repeated neglect for student populations' needs. The dissonance between the Board's rulings and the community they are committed to serving is inherent in the Board's structure. Currently, one of twelve seats is held by a student, Regent Kenya,³ who graduated in 2019, and only two of the twenty-four seats on the Regent Candidate Advisory Council are held by students. The Board of Regents are bound to under-serve students because student's aren't accurately represented.

Every two years, one-third of the Board seats are up for elections. With elections rapidly approaching in the Spring of 2023, we urge you to consider this bill with the utmost urgency to ensure tangible change is made in future Board of Regents selections. Below are our thoughts regarding the bill.

Regent Seat Assignments

We are pleased this bill emphasizes creating a holistically representative Board of Regents. The University of Minnesota stands on Miní Sóta Makhóche, the homelands of the Dakhóta Oyáte. We owe it to the indigenous communities across the state of Minnesota to ensure they are actively represented in the highest governing body of our institution, which is why we support the bill's language requiring at least one member of the Board to be an enrolled member of a federally-recognized tribe. We support the bill's requirement for one seat to be held by the tenured faculty member and another by a representative of a university employee organization. However, we do not support the bill only leaving one seat for a student

¹<https://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/columnist/nancy-armour/2021/06/26/shane-wiskus-olympic-trials-minnesota-decision-cut-gymnastics/5361326001/>

² <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1B6BMliOfJe3AKU6broTUZBNE1mFGtRsLr7ASZF6b5FI/edit>

³ <https://regents.umn.edu/mike-o-kenyanya>

representative. The Twin Cities campus alone has over 50,000 students in total enrollment,⁴ and the total enrollment of all the system campuses is over 66,000 students.⁵ It is egregious to believe one student, *one vote*, is sufficient to represent the entire population. Therefore, we recommend that two seats on the Board are reserved for students: one which is permanently held by a student from the Twin Cities campus and the other for a student from a greater Minnesota campus. *Nothing about us, without us, is for us.*

The Regent Candidate Advisory Council

In addition to the seat assignment section, we also value this bill's commitment to including a diverse set of stakeholders on the Regent Candidate Advisory Council (RCAC), specifically having five seats on the council be held by the Student Body Presidents of each of the system campuses. Our University prides itself in the democratic integrity of selecting our student leaders and representatives. As a result we believe having these representatives on the council is the most accurate way to reflect the needs of all 66,000 system campus students. Our faculty's commitment to education, welfare, and research all contribute to making the University of Minnesota the world class institution it is today, which is why we are incredibly excited about the changes providing five faculty seats to the Council. Lastly, the vibrance of our institution comes from the diverse set of experiences and perspectives held individually by each and every student and staff member who contribute to our University's success. Rather than celebrating this fact, we have systematically marginalized these communities, excluding them from key Board decisions. Thereby, we wholeheartedly agree with the addition of designees from the Indian Affairs Council, Minnesota Council on Latino Affairs, the Council of African Heritage, the Council on Asian-Pacific Minnesotans, and the Council on Disability holding seats on the council.

We have repeatedly seen the Board of Regents ignore the needs of students, faculty, and the community and act in their individual self interest. For these reasons, the changes proposed by Representative Schultz before the committee today are absolutely necessary.

Respectfully submitted,

Mitra Kian - State Government and Legislative Affairs Coordinator

Abdulaziz Mohamed - Undergraduate Student Body President

⁴ [Enrollments | Institutional Data and Research \(umn.edu\)](#)

⁵ [Enrollments | Institutional Data and Research \(umn.edu\)](#)