

My name is David Mesta and I am a student currently attending both Normandale Community College and Minnesota State University, Mankato. I am writing to you today in support of HF4449. As a first generation college student I have struggled to attend college due to the high cost of tuition as my financial aid fluctuated significantly from year to year, often leaving me with only a short amount of time to find funds to make up the difference.

After enrolling in college and receiving my financial aid package, my Pell Grant, state grant, and even scholarships left me thousands of dollars short of being able to cover my tuition bill. Because my family could not contribute financially to the cost of college, I was left to rely on loans to pay for my fall semester. Without these loans, I would have been forced to wait another year to attend school and risk my chance of graduating on time. Once I made it to the spring semester, I found myself having to drop a class because I couldn't afford a \$200 textbook with an online access code. It was either pay for the book, or pay for the remaining \$300 of my tuition bill. For most college students finding \$500 to cover any expense is incredibly difficult. This decision led to me taking less credits and delayed the completion of my degree.

During my second year of college, my family's financial situation changed significantly and not in a positive way, leading to a delay in my FAFSA and financial aid. While it was luckily accepted a couple of weeks into the semester, I was again hundreds of dollars short after my other grants were applied. The type of uncertainty and stress this created was something no student should have to go through, especially when you are in your first couple of weeks on campus when you are trying to focus on your studies. Having to focus on these tuition costs also lead to me having issues in other areas.

As a student from Greater Minnesota, there are few options for transportation outside of your own personal vehicle. During my first two years of college I regularly had to ask friends to jumpstart my car or for rides because my car would not work. On a very cold, -30-degree winter day, a friend and I found ourselves without transportation to get to class after my car broke down. Due to the weather, both of us missed a class and a test. I had to wait 7 months to find a new car because I didn't have the money to fix it. For those of us living in Greater Minnesota, reliable transportation can sometimes be the difference between academic success and falling behind, or even dropping out. By removing the costs of tuition for students like me, we could focus on making sure we have reliable transportation to get to class and on our studies.

I urge you to pass HF4449. While many of the financial barriers that I faced may seem small, for many students they can be insurmountable. While I have been fortunate enough to overcome many of these obstacles, many students are not, leading them to drop out or never enroll in college. If Minnesota wants to have a successful and educated workforce in the 21st century, then we need to make college more affordable.

David Mesta  
Normandale Community College