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Letter of Support HF 687
House Higher Education Committee

Chair Pelowski and Committee Members,

I am writing this letter in support of HF687, Inclusive Higher Education Act, which provides the much-needed framework and funding for increasing access to inclusive and affordable postsecondary education for youth and young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Inclusive higher education provides positive outcomes for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities—higher levels of employment, wages, and independent living as well as less reliance on social services like Social Security and Vocational Rehabilitation. Currently, less than three percent of Minnesotans with intellectual disabilities have access to postsecondary education offerings in Minnesota. This legislation will benefit many Minnesotans with intellectual and developmental disabilities who will be able to access more higher education options, and ones that are inclusive.

I recognize that institutions of higher education have varying experience and expertise with inclusive higher education and intellectual and developmental disabilities. The proposed legislation will establish The Minnesota Inclusive Higher Education Technical Assistance Center to provide the support and services that Minnesota public 2-year and 4-year colleges and universities will require to develop new postsecondary education options. The proposed competitive grants will bridge the funding gap for costs incurred to establish campus initiatives or enhance existing initiatives. The Technical Assistance Center will have a level of expertise about intellectual and developmental disabilities and inclusive higher education that is unmatched in Minnesota. In addition, the Technical Assistance Center will assist faculty and staff through community-of-practice gatherings, an annual conference as well as tools and resources to shorten their learning curve and avoid duplication of effort.

Opening inclusive higher education opportunities for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities to pursue a postsecondary education aligns with the State's efforts to advance access to postsecondary education, increase the education attainment rate, and improve adult outcomes for Minnesotans with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Given the chance, these students can make informed choices, pursue a postsecondary education, earn meaningful credentials, and earn a competitive wage in a career of their choice. All Minnesotans have a vested interest in students with intellectual disabilities becoming credentialed employees contributing to their community and our statewide economy.

The Institute on Community Integration (ICI) is optimistic that by passing HF687, Minnesota colleges and universities will have a roadmap and resources to successfully increase access and expand the postsecondary education opportunities that leads to improved competitive employment and independent living outcomes for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities. As such, ICI encourages the committee to support HF687 so that Minnesota can widen the pathway for young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities to earn higher education credentials, pursue a career of their choice, earn a competitive wage, and live independent lives of their choice.

Sincerely,



Amy Hewitt, Director and Professor
Institute on Community Integration