



May 1, 2023

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

The Honorable Omar Fateh, Chair
Senate Higher Education Committee
Minnesota Senate Bldg., Room 3219
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Chair Pelowski, Chair Fateh, and Members of the Conference Committee:
Throughout this legislative session, Students United has committed to advocating for the "A,B,C's": policies that increase affordability, widen access to basic needs, and encourage civic engagement among students. We are grateful for the care and thoughtfulness of the members of this committee in crafting policies that address these needs.

As students have expressed, tuition and cost relief are a primary concern across our campuses. The costs of higher education have skyrocketed over the past decade, making it challenging to afford higher education and slowing economic growth. That is why we support the tuition-freeze measure in Chair Pelowski's omnibus bill and the two-years of tuition free college included in Chair Fateh's omnibus bill. It's time to prioritize students and the affordability of continuing education, rather than understanding us only as revenue generators.

The tuition freeze included in [HF2073](#) is an essential step towards making higher education affordable and accessible for everyone. Coupled with other investments in [HF2073](#), it helps protect students' financial stability while giving our campuses the support they need. The Commitment to Higher Education Act included in [SF2075](#) is similarly critical for ensuring the ongoing affordability of higher education in Minnesota. This represents a profoundly equitable opportunity to invest in Minnesota's future workers and leaders. Of course, we recognize the difficult choices before this conference committee, but taken together, these actions can offer broad tuition relief for all while also creating a transformative program that will uplift more than 40,000 students. We encourage members to craft a final bill that incorporates elements of both proposals.

Just as tuition has increased for students across our state, the cost of living and basic needs has similarly increased. This leaves students in a precarious position, forced to choose between tuition, rent, textbooks, Food, and other basic necessities. Measures included in [HF2073](#) and [SF2075](#), however, would assist students in easing this burden.



Both the Senate and House higher education omnibus bills included appropriations for the Emergency Assistance for Postsecondary Students grant and increased the living and miscellaneous expense allowance from 109 percent to 115 percent of the federal poverty guidelines for the State Grant program. Students United supports these measures, as they will undoubtedly help students from low-income backgrounds and/or those struggling with financial insecurity.

Too many students across our seven universities also live with the daily burden of food insecurity, but we have the knowledge and ability to overcome this problem. We're pleased that both the Senate and House higher education omnibus bills included funding for the hunger-free campus grant. Expanding this program is a critical step towards eliminating food insecurity on Minnesota's campuses.

Across our seven universities, students have resoundingly called for more resources and access to mental health support. That is why Students United prioritized efforts to expand the scope and scale of mental health resources across our system, and we applaud Chair Pelowski and Chair Fateh for including \$26 million over the biennium for mental health support, including 24/7 access to these resources.

Widespread access to menstrual products is another basic need important to our students, and we are grateful for Senator Oumou Verbeten's leadership towards ending period poverty on our campuses. Senator Oumou Verbeten's menstrual equity bill was included in the Senate higher education omnibus bill, and we strongly encourage its adoption with a final higher education bill. As noted by Jennifer Weiss-Wolf in her book, *Periods Gone Public*: "the ability to access these items affects a person's freedom to work, study, stay healthy, and engage in the world with basic dignity." Including menstrual equity in the final higher education bill would bring about a substantial positive impact on students' health, sense of belonging, and overall wellbeing on their campuses at a marginal cost.

We appreciate the hard work and dedication of Chair Pelowski, Chair Fateh, and the members of the Senate and House higher education committees in shaping omnibus bills that support and empower current and future Minnesota State students. Now more than ever, we need to invest in our students to create a better future for Minnesota. We look forward to working with each of you to continue shaping a final higher education bill that will ensure that students can thrive and contribute to our communities across Minnesota.

Best,

Kaileigh Weber, 2022 - 2023 State Chair