

Dear Chairs Fateh, Rarick, and Wolgamott and members of the Higher Education Conference Committee:

Thank you for a productive and professional session. We are grateful for your partnership with Minnesota's students. As you confer, we ask you consider the following priorities, championed by the 120,000 students of our MinnState institutions.

We are heartened by the continued funding of Direct Admissions Minnesota, the best kept secret in Minnesota education. However, the Senate bill authored by Senators Gustafson and Duckworth, provides stronger statewide implementation and financial support necessary for the Office of Higher Education. In the Senate bill, Direct Admissions is funded at \$900,000/yr (compared to \$650,000 in the house) and requires all high schools to participate in the program by 2030. **Direct Admissions is a game changer for Minnesota students that reduces application barriers and fees, expands access for all high school graduates to a college education, and is a proven intervention for Minnesota's low FAFSA completion rate.** This simple requirement, in conjunction with programs like the North Star Promise, effectively bridges the gap from K-12 to higher education and cements Minnesota's place as a leader in creating a streamlined process of admission to public and private institutions alike. **We urge you to place 2030 in statute and create a runway to implementation for Minnesota's districts.** Zip code must not determine a student's access to this groundbreaking program.

We also support the direct transfer of Hunger Free Campus and Emergency Grant funds to public colleges and universities, rather than requiring an inefficient granting process with the Office of Higher Education. Repeatedly, pantry managers across the state have told us that the process for accessing funds is burdensome, sometimes leading to gaps in service like bare shelves or unstaffed pantries. As rates of hunger and prices continue to rise, college students need fully stocked and staffed pantries throughout the school year. **Directly appropriating funds to our system reduces bureaucratic red tape and ensures valuable funds make it to students who need it most when they need it most.**

Finally, we are grateful to Senators Fateh, Weber, Kupec, and Abeler for championing Narcan access in college dorms, the most likely location for an on-campus overdose. In the past several years, the legislature has made several policy changes and investments in overdose prevention in schools, including mandates for Narcan access in K-12. **However, there are no statewide interventions for Minnesota's postsecondary students who are at a much higher risk for overdose than K-12 students.** Furthermore, schools throughout the MinnState system have a wide range of harm reduction policies. We understand budgets are tight. However, after an initial investment in FY26, a fiscal note in the Senate estimated cost at around \$40,000/yr, a small price to pay to protect the lives of the 120,000 students who attend Minnesota colleges and universities. We urge the inclusion of SF164 in the final omnibus as we continue to collaborate with system partners to modernize policies and procedures around overdose prevention.

Thank you for your careful consideration and service to the state of Minnesota. Please reach out as needed.