

Date of Hearing: Tuesday, January 11, 2021

To: Members of the Education Finance Committee

From: Katelyn Dorry

Affiliated Organization (grade and high school): Grand Rapids High School

City of Residence: Grand Rapids, MN

Thank you Chair Davnie and members of the committee for inviting youth members to speak today. My name is Katelyn Dorry, and if y'all don't mind I'd like to begin by telling you a bit about who I am, and then I'll get my experiences with distance learning this past year. I was born in Roseau, Minnesota, and grew up in Grand Rapids on the iron range. Right now I'm a junior at Grand Rapids High School.

I've always been very "good" at school, being a quick learner, which made me a **huge nerd**. The only time I'd get yelled at in elementary was for reading during class time, or blurting out answers. In fifth grade I would go up to my teachers and ask for extra homework to do. *Being the "smart" kid has been one of the focal points for my identity for quite literally as far back as I can remember.* Eventually, I grew older, as kids do. I developed a passion for politics and policy work became my career goal. Dreams and fantasies I had as a little girl about going to an Ivy League school like Harvard or Princeton became real *possibilities*. That is if I made the right moves and worked my butt off right now.

As I moved into high school, my focus shifted from playing video games and hanging out with friends to building my resume and making myself into a viable candidate for the places I want to go and networks I need to have access to. However, as I started looking around for these experience-gaining opportunities, it became increasingly apparent that, as a student from greater Minnesota, my options are limited. You see, I'm from what many people around here like to call a "dying town". Job opportunities are limited and growing smaller. There are growing problems of poverty and chemical dependency. And it's understood around here that young people if they wish to be successful, need to leave, seeking careers, opportunities, and building lives elsewhere.

As a student with high-achieving aspirations, I've been faced with the frustrations of a lack of opportunities and resources to be able to measure up to the metro kids in competitive admissions processes. It often feels like engaging in many of these cities-based opportunities are my only options. This includes the ordeal of the three-hour drive down here, finding a place to stay, paying for gas and food for the trip, and getting work and school off. If it weren't for the fact that we've moved to an online forum, I wouldn't have been able to speak to you all here today. Currently, I'm on the hunt for summer internship opportunities in the offices of this

legislature, an opportunity I'd be grateful for but would mean moving down there for months and leaving my family and friends behind. I am fortunate in one way, that my school is one of the only schools in greater Minnesota to offer the international baccalaureate program.

I am an IB diploma candidate, which for those that don't know, it means I am taking the equivalent of seven college-level classes in a special honors program. This program raises my chances of getting into Princeton from 5.5% to about 14%. A statistic that I've held on to tight the last few months, since, as you know, this year didn't turn out how I envisioned when I signed up.

I was not built for distance learning. I'm a social being that learns in a structured environment with back-and-forth interaction with my teachers and peers. This year, the isolation on top of everything has been crushing. Last year, my school moved to distance at the end of my sophomore year, I found myself overwhelmed, exhausted at the smallest assignment. Moving into this year came with dread, rather than the excitement I had months before, knowing my workload would triple in an uncertain learning environment.

Since the beginning of this school year, I have now gone through three different changes in learning models, all with their own upheavals and anxieties. If you'll allow me to be honest, my mental health has crumbled this year. This year put me in therapy. This year put me on antidepressants and anti-anxiety medication. And as I struggle with the workload and tasks that used to be simple, this year has me questioning that "smart kid" identity. With that comes the terror of questioning my own capabilities, of questioning my dreams and aspirations. If I can't handle this, how am I supposed to handle Harvard? Do I really deserve to go there? Am I really intelligent as I've always thought? As strong as I hoped I was?

This pandemic brought me to my knees. I went from feeling invincible to just feeling small. Unable to keep up with my own expectations of myself, with the extracurriculars I need to participate in, with my duties as a Minnesota Youth Council rep. Honestly, my anxiety is the only thing keeping my grades up. And I am doing this alone. There's little support from the school, my poor overworked counselor takes a week to respond to my emails, having a caseload of hundreds of students all experiencing similar struggles as me.

I am coming to you today as representatives with the power to help. You have the power to fund mental health services. To bring in counselors for more than just career and college. You have the power to fund programs and opportunities for greater Minnesota students, to bring help to a community that feels left behind and forgotten. Today I ask you for help.

Thank you for listening.