

Thank you Chair Bernardy and Committee members:

My name is Matthew Rogers, and I am a Machine Trades Faculty at Anoka Technical College. I would like to submit this testimony as an inquiry about the future of the Leveraged Equipment funding allocated to the Minnesota State Colleges and University budget for the 2022-2023 biennium. Some may not be aware of the history of this funding. It started out as a pilot program in 2012, where the State of Minnesota through both branches of the legislative Higher Education committees, allocated at that time \$1.2 million dollars in funding to be matched through cash or in-kind donations by industry and/or individuals for programs in high technology and in demand as listed by DEED. The pilot was very successful and in the 2014-2015 biennium was enshrined in law allocating \$21.8 million or \$7.278 million each year across the system for purchase of the expensive and constantly evolving high technology equipment that keeps our programs relevant to the industries we serve. After the success of this program with both the private sector partners it encouraged to be involved and those hungry for employees skilled in equipment usage in their disciplines and the overwhelming participation that resulted in donations, at least on our campus, were some times valued at 3 times the funds we were allocated from the system. Though the system has made changes annually to the requirements to access these funds, the work to procure them has steadfastly remained one of the few ways to stay current with the technology changes in the field.

Fast forward to March of 2020 when the pandemic took hold, hands on fields like welding, electricians, auto tech, and a variety of other programs that are absolutely impossible to teach well remotely and have acceptable outcomes, we stumbled through the final 8 weeks of the semester relying heavily on the first 8 weeks of in-person classes to grade students or prolonged the semester into the summer to finish classes once PPE and safety protocols were outlined. Fall 2020 and Spring of 2021 have all been hybrid, which while far from ideal, is the only way to continue safely and even come close to acceptable outcomes ethically. It has been an impossible situation for many technical programs across the state. Contrary to the K-12 system that has funding established and faculty that refuse to return to campus, tuition contributes about half of the funding for higher ed institutions and makes a hard choice of widespread layoffs or run classes in this manner, which has risks both the faculty and students with both needing to be acceptive and adhere to the safety protocols. To date this has been successful at our campus as we have not had community spread.

During the fiscal dilemmas, the pandemic has presented the Minnesota Board of Trustees agreed to the Minnesota State's request to reallocate the leveraged equipment funds to hold down student tuition increases for the 2021 fiscal year at the June board meeting as outlined in the presentation. This is understandable considering the circumstances, and I take no issue with the one time decision though others might. My concern is that these funds will never return, be folded back into the operating budget, and not be used for the intent the legislature originally dictated by this body and its Senate counterpart.

Thank you for your consideration