

May 3, 2021

Senator David Tomassoni
328 Capitol
75 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd.
St. Paul, MN 55155

Representative Connie Bernardy
563 State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Chair Tomassoni, Chair Bernardy, and Conference Committee members:

On behalf of the Minnesota Private College Council's (Council) 17 nonprofit private colleges, we urge you to make the Minnesota State Grant program an important priority by making a significant investment of new, ongoing funding in the program in the 2021 Omnibus Higher Education bill.

As you heard in the stories told by the many students this session who testified before your committees and met with you over Zoom, State Grant awards have a transformative impact on the students who receive them. Financial aid targeted at the students who struggle the most to complete a postsecondary education is essential to meeting the State's higher education attainment goals and having the educated workforce employers will need in the future. Equally important, investing in the State Grant will help close educational disparities and drive upward economic mobility for students of color and lower-income students. In fact, 56 percent of Minnesota's BIPOC students receive a State Grant.

Investing in the State Grant program is a decision that reflects Minnesota values. Increasing funding for the State Grant program is needed more than ever, when so many of these struggling students have lost work-study and off-campus jobs, and, as the State Economist has noted, lower-income families have been hit the hardest by the financial impacts of the pandemic. For these reasons, we believe the State Grant program should be an important priority for increased funding in the State budget.

The House and Senate have taken different approaches to expanding State Grants, with the House focusing on increasing the Living and Miscellaneous Expense allowance (LME) and the Senate focusing on reducing Assigned Family Responsibilities (AFRs). We would ask the conference committee to find a fair balance between the two approaches. One way to approach this would be to implement a combination of reduced AFRs and increased LME. Another meaningful way to lower student costs would be to reduce the Assigned Student Responsibility (ASR). A reduction in the ASR benefits all State Grant recipients, regardless of their family income or the institution that they attend.

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Minneapolis College of Art and Design

Saint John's University
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There are two additional items we ask you to consider as you put together the final higher education bill. First, we appreciate the inclusion of private non-profit colleges in the Hunger Free Campus Act, a student-led initiative. The Council hopes that the conferees will adopt the House position, which allows our member colleges to apply for the small matching grants if the designation is earned. Second, the Council hopes that the conferees will adopt the transcript language in the Senate bill. The Senate's language helps students obtain employment or apply to graduate school while also preserving an institution's most effective means of collecting payment – a transcript hold – for cases where that is necessary. We want the conferees to know that in all cases our colleges work individually with each student to resolve amounts owed as fairly as possible.

As you develop the final omnibus higher education bill, we ask that you make a meaningful increase in the appropriation for the State Grant program so that students with the greatest financial need are a high priority in your final bill. On behalf of the 43 percent of all Minnesota students at both public and private colleges who receive a State Grant, thank you for considering this request.

Sincerely,



Rebecca Bergman
Chair, MPCC Board
President, Gustavus Adolphus College



Paul Cerkvenik
President
Minnesota Private College Council

Senate Conferees:

Senator Rarick
Senator Goggin
Senator Jasinski
Senator Clausen

House Conferees:

Representative Christensen
Representative Keeler
Representative Klevorn
Representative O'Neill

cc:

Governor Tim Walz
Lt. Governor Peggy Flanagan
Commissioner Dennis Olson, Jr., Office of Higher Education
Aara Johnson, Senior Policy Advisor, Governor Walz's Office

Senate Majority Leader Paul Gazelka
Senate Minority Leader Susan Kent
House Speaker Melissa Hortman
House Majority Leader Ryan Winkler
House Minority Leader Kurt Daudt