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April 5, 2022

MN House Higher Education Finance and Policy
Chairwoman Connie Bernardy
563 State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Madame Chair,

I want to begin by recognizing the positive provisions included in your proposed Higher Education Omnibus Bill. Minnesota has faced innumerable challenges over the past few years. Many of those challenges will require legislative action to help solve. We are thankful you have found higher education a worthy place to invest the state's finite resources. It is evident that our shared values of equity, access, and affordability were prioritized when decisions were being made on what to include as you developed the House supplemental funding proposal. The proposal has left no doubt that this committee understands the importance of higher education to the success of our state.

We applaud your proposal to provide two years of free tuition and fees at Minnesota State colleges for low-income Minnesotans. However, we encourage you to consider the addition of our state universities to that program. More students will complete a degree if they have more options to determine the best fit for their future. Although many students who choose community colleges intend to transfer to a university and complete a bachelor's degree, unfortunately, many never make that leap. Suppose students have the option to start their post-secondary education at a state university with the promise of the first two years being paid for by grants. In that case, the likelihood they complete a degree increases exponentially. As many on this committee have witnessed personally, universities offer a different student experience that often provides the resources and attention some students demand to be successful. And the university experience extends beyond the classroom. Our campuses provide a comprehensive opportunity for growth and responsibility that all prospective students should be afforded the opportunity.

In addition, we are concerned that many of the programs funded as part of your bill will fall flat because our colleges and universities continue to struggle to meet some of the most basic needs of students. If the system request of \$30 million was funded in addition to all the worthy programs included in your bill, there is no doubt many more students will realize the full potential offered by these programs. Our colleges and universities have faced dramatic reductions in student support staff, faculty, course and program offerings, and more that have limited our ability to serve the students we are working hard to attract as part of the Equity2030 goal.

We are hopeful that some of our concerns will be addressed as this process continues. We look forward to working alongside you as partners to ensure that as many students successfully achieve their dreams.

Sincerely,

Brent Jeffers
IFO President

Cc:
Vice-Chair Christenson
Rep. Marion O'Neill
Commissioner Dennis Olson
Committee Administrator Sean Herring