

May 11, 2022

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 ask that the Higher Education conferees make it a top priority to invest directly in students through need-based financial aid provided by the Minnesota State Grant.

As you heard from students who testified before your committees and met with you this Session, State Grant awards are life-changing for the lower-income and middle-income students who receive them. And the educational success of these students is critical to meeting the needs of employers for a highly skilled and well-educated workforce.

Investments in the State Grant program have a big impact:

- 44% of all Minnesota students enrolled in Minnesota colleges receive a State Grant;
- 59% of Minnesota students of color receive a state grant; and
- 67% of State Grant recipients have incomes below \$50,000.

Investing in the State Grant will help close educational disparities, drive upward economic mobility, and strengthen Minnesota's economy.

Increasing funding for the State Grant program is especially needed now. State Grant recipients are the students who have struggled the most to pay for college and stay in college during the COVID-19 pandemic, while State Grant funding has received only nominal increases during the last three years.

The Council strongly supports the House bill's proposal to reduce the Assigned Student Responsibility (ASR) by two points, lowering the educational costs students are expected to pay. A reduction in the ASR increases grant awards for all 64,500 students who are projected to receive a State Grant next year, regardless of the Minnesota institution that they attend or whether they attend part-time or full-time. And, an additional 1,500 students will be newly eligible to receive a State Grant under this proposal. The two-percentage point ASR reduction in the House bill will increase grants by \$350 to \$530 for full-time students.

On behalf of the Minnesota students at both public and private colleges who receive a State Grant, thank you for considering this important request.

Minnesota Private Colleges | Excellence within reach

Augsburg University  
Bethany Lutheran College  
Bethel University  
Carleton College  
College of Saint Benedict  
The College of St. Scholastica

Concordia College, Moorhead  
Concordia University, St. Paul  
Gustavus Adolphus College  
Hamline University  
Macalester College  
Minneapolis College of Art and Design

Saint John's University  
Saint Mary's University of Minnesota  
St. Catherine University  
St. Olaf College  
University of St. Thomas

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There are three other provisions of the bill that we encourage conferees to support:

- Our institutions and students are grateful that the House bill includes private nonprofit colleges in the Hunger Free Campus Act, a student-led initiative. We urge the conferees to adopt the House position to allow private nonprofit colleges to be eligible for the small matching grants, and to increase the appropriation to meet the food insecurity needs of all colleges and universities, public and nonprofit. This initiative has broad support of students at both public and nonprofit institutions.
- Our member institutions support the additional investments made by the House and Senate in students pursuing teaching degrees. These investments will help diversify our teaching workforce and lessen teacher shortages.
- Our colleges strongly support expanding the scholarship program for Native American students in Minnesota as proposed by the House bill.

Finally, we want to express concern over a proposed change that would open participation in the State Grant program to institutions not located in Minnesota. We believe this is a slippery slope to expansion of the State Grant program to non-Minnesota institutions that are not located and significantly invested in our state. In the last academic year, eight of our member institutions offered degree-completion programs for non-traditional students that served more than 7,000 students. Of those students, more than 6,000 were in online or hybrid programs in 32 different majors, with more than 4,100 students enrolled in entirely online majors.

The Council looks forward to working with conference committee members to answer questions and provide information as the committee works to produce a final higher education omnibus bill. Thank you for the work you do to support students and thank you for carefully considering the priorities that are important for so many students.

Sincerely,



Paul Cerkenik  
President, Minnesota Private College Council

Senate Conferees:

Senator Rarick  
Senator Jasinski  
Senator Housley  
Senator Clausen

House Conferees:

Representative Christensen  
Representative Klevorn  
Representative Keeler  
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 Jeremy Miller  
Senate Minority Leader Melisa Lopez Franzen  
House Speaker Melissa Hortman  
House Majority Leader Ryan Winkler  
House Minority Leader Kurt Daudt