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TESTIMONY OF BAUR BUSH with support from Chris Choy Bush

Minnetonka, MN

Chair Pelowski and members:

My name is Baur Bush. Thank you for the chance to testify today in support of House File 687.

I am 12-years old and a 7<sup>th</sup> grader at West Junior High School in Hopkins. I want to go to college with my friends and earn a degree in sports or hospitality management. I have met many friends who have gone to college, and I want to have my chance. I love to cook, and I have been supported by my family, Kid's & Company at Gatewood Elementary and the community at GiGi's Playhouse – Twin Cities to have the experience to learn to read recipes, try cooking dishes, being supported through play and garden.

It is important for me to have opportunities like my classmates without disabilities to have a higher education. It is a part of life that I hear my parents, my family and friends talk about where they went away to school and stayed on campus and got to meet people from around the world and choose classes that they like to help them get the jobs they love. I am involved in all kinds of sports and am very good at reading people and what they need. I am an athlete with Special Olympics, Team G, for many years. I am a friendly, funny, and fun young man with dreams of living independently and contributing to my community through meaningful employment. I am happiest and healthiest when I have opportunities for both meaningful work and for participation in inclusive community activities.

I am in General Ed classes and have been able to be with my peers because there is the drive and expectation to complete my high school curriculum in 2028 and my transition program in 2031. I want to live with my friends, be independent, and find a job where I can take care of myself. I am an only child, and I will be able to take care of myself and support myself.

My mom is the project manager in my life. She is always listening and learning more about what I can do when I get out of school. I want to go to college like my friends. Unfortunately, the choices are limited. Mom has learned that post-secondary options, my family and I discovered there are only 3 options in Minnesota – two are two-year colleges with only one-year occupational skills programs and no academic track in my area of interest, and the third is very expensive and does not offer a degree or certificate program that fits my interests. I am not a traditional learner but can make great progress if given the right supports. I need flexibility in the ways in which study material is given to me and how I best use it to complete the work required. I also would greatly benefit from having peer mentors to

study with and having alternative ways to show that I understand the class requirements, as testing tends to freak me out. Finally, I need some sort of supported and safe housing options on campus as I do not drive and require supports to ensure I am being safe. Inclusive Higher Education would provide me with the supports that I need in college. However, there currently is not a Minnesota college that enrolls students with an intellectual disability and also offers a certificate or degree in my chosen career interest areas.

A college that is a good fit for me would be in a larger metropolitan area, has good public transportation, offers inclusive and supported housing options, enrolls students with an intellectual disability and is affordable. I would benefit from paid internships and employment as part of my college certificate or degree. I want to learn and have a career in either hospitality or sports management. If given the opportunity, I can contribute to society and be a solution to the shortage of workers that we see all around us today.

We need more Minnesota college options for students like me and for that reason I ask that you support House File 687. Thank you very much for your time.