

Dear Senator Tomassoni,

February 12, 2022

My name is Erik van Kuijk, I'm Head of Ophthalmology at the University of Minnesota. Say, I spoke Phil Griffin yesterday who is representing myself and the MN Lions with respect to SF-1862, which aims to prohibit for-profit eye banking in Minnesota, and I hope you support this legislation when it comes out of HHSFP-committee. I'm sorry to hear that you are suffering from a progressive form of ALS, and will keep you and your family in my prayers. ALS is a difficult problem, which will require substantial research at academic medical centers and NIH, in order to find a cure.

The University of Minnesota could play an important role in this endeavor, however we are sending talented young physician scientists away to other states by cutting men's sports, thus losing the ability to train and retain talented scientists. Let me explain: In 2014 I was directly involved with recruiting a high school student from Texas, Yaro Pochinka, to the University of Minnesota Men's Gymnastics team. Coach Mike Burns asked me to meet this young man, because he wanted to be assured that his degree here would allow him to be admitted to Medical School later. In 2018 Mr. Pochinka graduated in Neuroscience, and a few years later, I guided him with his Medical School application, and subsequently he was admitted to Medical School at the University of Minnesota. He continues to train in Gymnastics everyday while in Medical School, however without an NCAA level gymnastics program, we would have NEVER recruited him to the UofM, and we are now losing similar opportunities. Young talented scholars like Yaro, dual trained in Neuroscience and Medicine as well as talented in sports, are key to finding a cure for ALS in the future. Why deny them these opportunities at the University of Minnesota going forward? Sadly, his brother David who is equally talented, had to transfer to another institution, following elimination of Men's Gymnastics by AD Coyle and 7 Regents, in 2021.

I appreciate that you have scheduled a hearing on this topic next week. Since the University of Minnesota is asking for nearly One Billion Dollars extra from the budget surplus, I'm writing to specifically ask you to also consider 10M to reinstate Men's Gymnastics, Tennis and Track at the NCAA level at the University of Minnesota. That is in alignment with the ask from the University for these funds, to train the future workforce of Minnesota. That is enough to keep these programs supported for 5-6 years, and during this time we can raise enough money to setup an endowment to keep them funded permanently.

Thank you for your consideration of this request. My schedule permitting I will attend the hearing next Tuesday.

Respectfully,

Erik van Kuijk, MD, PhD  
Head of Ophthalmology  
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