

Chair and Members of the Higher Education Finance and Policy Committee,

My name is Blake Mayes and I am a high school counselor and the lead counselor at Spectrum High School in Elk River.

I would like to testify in support of the proposal to waive college application fees that is in front of you all. In my experience working with high school seniors, this bill could provide our Minnesota students with not only increased opportunities to apply to postsecondary institutions, but also provide them with a better understanding of the financial ramifications of attendance. Another positive effect that could come from this is that more talented students may choose to stay in-state for postsecondary education, which could also have positive effects for our state's workforce.

At my high school, I work with around 100 high school seniors, many of whom come from families that have a limited knowledge of the true costs of attending college and who may not have an unlimited amount of funding to apply to many institutions. The vast majority of my students apply to at least two or more postsecondary institutions and many of them charge \$50 or more for their application. I am thankful that many students have the opportunity to apply to many of our state's postsecondary institutions for free during October, which has been designated as College Knowledge Month in Minnesota by the Office of Higher Education; however, we have to remember that these students are teenagers and very few of them have any idea of where they want to attend school, much less what they want to do with their lives in the future. I'm sure each one of us could think back to what we wanted to do in high school or maybe what we ended up majoring in college, after changing our minds a time or 2. How many of us could say that we are exactly where we thought we'd be all of these years later? My guess is not many of us.

Because of the constantly changing target of postsecondary education and training, many students change their mind after the free applications of College Knowledge Month fade from view and must pay the fees to apply. With the rise of sites like Common App, students often apply to somewhere between 3 and 8 schools. If a student has to pay for each application in addition to testing fees for things like Advanced Placement (AP) or the ACT, costs can easily rise to \$500 or more, before a student has even enrolled in classes as an undergraduate student. While many postsecondary institutions waive application fees for students who receive free and reduced lunch, as a student gets older, it has been shown that the number of students applying for free and reduced lunch decreases, most likely because of the stigma attached to the program. Even if a student has free and reduced lunch, they still must know that their application fees can be waived and/or have a school counselor who knows them and their



background and can help provide that information. Information from the American School Counseling Association shows that our state is in the bottom 5 of school counselor to student ratio in the country and each school counselor has nearly 3 times the recommended number of students on their caseload. However, that ratio is not what we're here about today. In lieu of funding more school counseling positions, if our state wants to close the attainment gap for students of all socioeconomic backgrounds, covering the cost of application fees is a very equitable practice.

In addition, many institutions do not provide the true cost of attendance until after a student has applied and been accepted to their school. It is hard for many students to get a true grasp on the cost of attending each university and to make an informed decision on where they should go to school. Some of this lack of information leads to the student debt crisis that many in my generation and future generations could face. If this bill were to be passed, more students would apply to multiple colleges and universities, which in turn should help them and their families make more informed financial decisions. This will also help our state keep many of our talented students in state, which is exceptionally important. Thank you for your time and consideration of this bill and of my testimony.