



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

I am writing this letter as an endorsement for the state of Minnesota to fund a one to two-year pilot program to waive college application fees at all of Minnesota's public, tribal, and private non-profit colleges and universities sponsored by the department of Minnesota Department of Education. My name is Teresa Hichens-Olson and I have served as the Director of College Access at Great River School for the last seven years. I am also a Bush Foundation Fellow and a 2019 MACAC award winner for Student Support with Minnesota.

My thirty years in education has been spent not only in the role as a teacher, guidance counselor and college coach but in support of marginalized students throughout the state. I am deeply passionate about college access and I see this bill as a step towards the ability to remove barriers which keep students from applying to college. Currently, a typical high school student may spend upwards of several hundreds of dollars just for the chance to be consider for the opportunity of a college education. While some colleges may offer fee waivers, many times that is tied by supplying additional paperwork and must be initiated by the student or their families, and while this may seem like a small barrier for some, it an impossible barrier for others.

In my thirty years of education I've seen countless students walk away from applying to a college because they could not afford the application fee or might apply for a college that waives the application fee but overall increases the student's debt because it does not have as many scholarship opportunities. The passing of this bill would create an even playing field and offer open doors for all students regardless of barriers.

I believe this bill though a small factor of the many barriers which students face in this college process would create a stronger Minnesota. Students would apply to more colleges within the state if fees were removed thus keeping talent within our communities, especially those rural college towns where college students not only add to the financial health of these communities but continue to volunteer and work in these places once accepted into higher education. And again, the decrease of student debt for the younger generation builds a stronger and healthier environment for not only their future but the state as whole.

I am happy to answer any additional questions you may have about this issue or college access. I am happy to serve as a testimony of the passing of this bill to create change within Minnesota and the positive impact that the removal of college application fees will have on students. Thank you for taking the time to read my letter and for listening.

Sincerely,

Teresa Hichens-Olson
Director of College Access
Great River School
thichensolson@greatriverschool.org