

Testimony of Dr. Christopher Brown, Interim Dean
Minnesota State University, Mankato
College of Arts and Humanities

Chair Tomassoni and members of the committee:

My name is Dr. Christopher Brown. I am Interim Dean of the College of Arts and Humanities at Minnesota State University, Mankato. It is my honor and pleasure to provide testimony in support of the Inclusive Higher Education Act bill, SF 3972.

During the past year, I have worked with Dr. Diana Joseph, Department of English, and Dr. Matt Sewell, the Special Assistant to the Dean, to develop and design an inclusive higher education initiative for consideration at the university. I believe that higher education for people with intellectual disabilities is a vehicle for learning and employment opportunities, and a means of self-empowerment. The goal of the proposed inclusive higher education initiative is to offer students with intellectual disabilities an inclusive experience of learning in classrooms, living in dorms, working in internships, and participating in student activities with matriculating students without disabilities. Students with intellectual disabilities are profoundly underserved in postsecondary education and deserve a future that is different from the limited choices that are available to them now.

In the proposed inclusive higher education initiative, we will apply for a certification as a Comprehensive Transition and Postsecondary program to support students with intellectual

disabilities prior to launch. The length of the proposed initiative is 96 credits over 4 years—24 credits per year. Students choose academic coursework from curated packages of courses with emphases across the university's offerings including advocacy, health, entrepreneurship, and creative and fine arts. The proposed initiative will follow guidelines and best practices of Think College, a national organization dedicated to expanding and improving inclusive higher education options for students with intellectual disabilities.

During the design process, we have reached out to leadership and faculty from every college and staff from a variety of campus programs across the university. Dr. Joseph has been instrumental in reaching out to state-wide organizations, area businesses, community leaders as well as prospective students and their families. We are pleased with the enthusiasm and support that we have received and see great potential for collaboration.

As a professor, I have worked with students with an intellectual disability. I know the capability of students with an intellectual disability. With the supports, mentorship and access to a quality postsecondary education, they achieve and are able to live more autonomously with dignity. That is why I am fully supportive of inclusive higher education initiatives.

The proposed Technical Assistance Center and competitive grant funding in SF3972 will help guide our work and provide the needed funding to establish a self-sustaining initiative. The technical assistance support gives us a pathway and avoids creating resources, policy and practices that already exist. I request your support for SF3972.