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TO: Chair Tomassoni and Senate Higher Education Finance and Policy Committee Members

Dear Chair Tomassoni and Committee Members:

Please accept this letter of support for the SF3972 Inclusive Higher Education Act as an affirmation of our full support and encouragement for this work in Minnesota. The proposed legislation provides the much-needed framework and funding for increasing access to postsecondary education for youth and young adults with intellectual disabilities.

The Think College National Coordinating Center (NCC) at the Institute for Community Inclusion at UMass Boston provides training and technical assistance nation-wide on the provision of transition and higher education opportunities for students with intellectual disabilities that lead to competitive employment outcomes, and have worked with leaders in Minnesota that are committed to increasing postsecondary education options for students with intellectual disabilities in their state. We are confident that the Institute on Community Integration (ICI) is poised to lead the statewide initiative to shape and expand inclusive higher education in Minnesota. The requested funding will support the establishment of The Minnesota Inclusive Higher Education Technical Assistance Center to provide the support and services that Minnesota public 2-year and 4-year colleges and universities will require to develop new postsecondary education options. The proposed competitive grants will bridge the funding gap for costs incurred to establish campus initiatives or enhance existing initiatives. The Institute on Community Integration (ICI) at the University of Minnesota has a level of expertise in intellectual and developmental disabilities and inclusive higher education that is unmatched in Minnesota. ICI will be a strong and competent steward of these funds and provide high quality technical assistance to support the development of postsecondary options for students with an intellectual disability.

We know that the investment in inclusive higher education translates into higher levels of employment, wages and independent living as well as less reliance on social services like Social Security and Vocational Rehabilitation for people with intellectual disabilities. If passed, this expansion will be a great benefit to Minnesotans with intellectual disabilities since less than 3% have access to Minnesota postsecondary education offerings today.

Upon passage of the SF3972 Inclusive Higher Education Act, we look forward to collaborating with the Institute on Community Integration to increase access and expand the postsecondary education opportunities that will widen the pathway for young adults with intellectual disabilities to earn higher education credentials, pursue a career of their choice, earn a competitive wage, and live in homes of their choice.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Cathryn Weir'.

Cathryn Weir, Program Director
Think College, Institute for Community Inclusion, University of Massachusetts Boston