



1 February 2023

Chair Fateh and Senate Higher Education Finance and Policy Committee Members:

Please accept this letter of support for **SF655: Inclusive Higher Education Act**. Think College offers our full support and encouragement for this work in Minnesota. The proposed legislation provides a much-needed framework and funding to increase access to postsecondary education for young adults with intellectual disability. Other states that have made a similar investment have experienced significant growth in postsecondary education options and certificates earned by students with intellectual disability.

The Think College National Coordinating Center (NCC) was established in 2010 with funding from the US Department of Education to provide training and technical assistance nationwide on the provision of postsecondary education opportunities for students with intellectual disability that lead to competitive employment outcomes. We have worked with leaders in Minnesota that are committed to increasing postsecondary education options for students with intellectual disability 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 Minnesota-based support and services that MN 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 intellectual disabilities.

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

Upon passage of **SF655: Inclusive Higher Education Act**, we look forward to collaborating with the Institute on Community Integration to increase access to postsecondary education, widening the pathway for young adults with intellectual disability to earn higher education credentials, pursue a career of their choice, earn a competitive wage, and live in homes of their choice.

Regards,



Cathryn Weir, Program Director
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