



Dear Members of the Senate Higher Education Committee,

The undersigned utilities and advocates appreciate the inclusion of section 38 in the Higher Education Omnibus bill before you today. This provision adds the energy sector to the list of industries eligible for the Workforce Development Scholarship Program at Minnesota State.

Already a leading sector for job growth, new energy jobs are expected to accelerate following the passage of significant state and federal policy and spending in the energy sector, including Minnesota's Carbon Free by 2040 bill and the federal Inflation Reduction Act.

Layering accelerated growth on existing workforce challenges could leave Minnesota without the workforce needed to implement the grid electrification and expansion required by law. The 2023 U.S. Energy & Employment report found that 82% of energy employers reported that it was very or somewhat difficult to fill their open positions, specifically naming small applicant pools, insufficient qualifications, and lack of training as the top 3 reasons for that difficulty in hiring. In addition to difficulties finding skilled workers, 25% of the electric cooperative workforce in MN is eligible to retire in the next 5 years.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics predicts long-term demand for workers in energy roles, with solar and wind technicians predicted to be in the top 15 fastest growing occupations over the next 10 years and electrician demand growing at double the average overall job growth rate. The median hourly wage for all energy workers in the U.S. is also 34 percent higher than the national median for all jobs.

The workforce scholarship program was designed to drive scholarship dollars towards students who pursue jobs in high demand industries and encourage colleges to work with local employers to improve workforce pipelines and leverage state money for additional private investment in scholarships. Utilities operate in every corner of the state and are active members of their local communities, including through significant philanthropic work. The energy industry is well-positioned to work with local colleges to develop workforce pipelines and fund supplemental scholarship awards.

Adding energy to the Workforce Development Scholarship Program will not only support students pursuing high-wage careers in a sector with significant growth and opportunity but also ensure that Minnesota has the workforce needed to reach its energy goals. We are incredibly grateful for your support of this proposal through its inclusion in SF 4003.

Please do not hesitate to reach out to any of the following utilities or organizations if you have any questions or wish to discuss further.

Sincerely,

