

**Marie Kuhlman**  
**(Student @ Century College – White Bear Lake, MN 55110)**  
**Testimony submitted in support of: North Star Promise Expansion**  
**February 13, 2025**

My name is Marie Kuhlman, I am a 47-year-old student at Century College who graduates in May this year with four associate degrees (Criminal Justice, Social Work, Sociology, Liberal Arts) and am a recipient of the North Star Promise for the current (24-25) academic year. I am submitting this written testimony to share how the North Star Promise has had an impact on my life and education.

I began my education in my 20s but due to many life circumstances, I had to put it on hold. Fast forward to Summer 2023 when things changed again and I was able to return to school; during that summer I struggled through major illness that resulted in my being hospitalized for nearly a month – but I made it through and received 2 As and 1 B for the courses I was taking. Each semester following that first semester back up to the current year I struggled to maintain the finances I needed to attend school due to medical needs – my husband took on a second job and stress increased at home, the entire time I was just trying to muscle through because I was/am so close to graduating. When I heard about the North Star Promise, I didn't initially think much of it as I wasn't sure – it seemed too good to be true and I was too worried about trying to keep from being homeless and keep bills paid. When I completed my FAFSA for the current academic year and was awarded the North Star Promise – it was like the weight of the months leading to that point was lifted and the light at the end of the tunnel became so bright. Because I received the North Star Promise for my last year (2 semesters) at Century College – stress as I round the corner and cross the finish line that graduation had been lifted. Because of North Star Promise and other “lucky” things popping up I will graduate with four degrees – and be able to celebrate a well earned and fought for education decades in the making.

I wanted to share my story because unfortunately, my story is not wholly unique. Many Minnesotans struggle to meet their basic needs, many Minnesotans struggle with significant medical needs and those same Minnesotans also struggle with a desire to be **something more** to their families, their communities, and their state. We want to feel like our state supports us, that we are valued, and we want to do our best to be part of what makes Minnesota great. We want to be nurses, and social workers; work in the criminal justice system, as well as work in much-needed positions like the Auto industry, HVAC, health care, and more.

While my current educational path comes to a close in May this year when I step on the stage to receive my hard-won degrees – I do plan to move on. Although I will not likely qualify for North Star Promise again as I move on to complete a bachelor's degree – I would never have made it this far without the North Star Promise. I am forever grateful that my state invested in me and my future.

Our state struggles to fill positions in so many areas – many of which require or are supported by higher education. For so many in our state higher education isn't dismissed for lack of want – but more of lack of resources; they struggle to keep their head above water and to maintain hope. By removing obstacles that stop so many Minnesotans from thinking higher education and the better life it could bring is out of reach – we as a state will collectively remove obstacles our state has in make our future as a whole brighter.

In 2023, nearly ½ million Minnesotans received SNAP ("Welfare Recipients by State").

Overall, year over year the U.S. Census has detailed that those who do not graduate from high school or those who receive minimal higher education are recipients of some form of means tested benefits – increasing to current levels from 37.3% of people in 2012 (Sharkey).

Too many sources to cite here detail how as little as a 6–12-month certificate program or a 2-year degree can increase success and independence for a meaningful long-term length of time.

In 2022, Minnesota spent an average of \$40,000 on welfare per person in poverty (Njolomole)

– considering many of these “people” are part of family units that average four people (adults and children) that equals out to \$160,000 – it is not unreasonable to assume that that dollar amount has increased since.

In 2024 Minnesota the cost of living for a partnered family with childcare expenses (1 FT worker, 1 PT worker) ranged from low \$50,000 figures to high \$70,000 figures depending on the county ("Cost of Living in Minnesota (2024)").

In the most basic sense, considering these figures, Minnesotans need North Star Promise in order to secure a future that benefits them on an individual/family unit level and can be of benefit to Minnesota as a whole. I would suggest that the program could produce more solid long lasting results if it were expanded to be a fully supportive program – covering tuition, fees, AS WELL as books and basic needs for at least the

first two years of a college education if not the entire duration of eligibility of the program up to graduation/receipt of a bachelor's degree. By investing this money in our citizens now to have a better chance at securing their futures – we also have a better chance at continuing to secure the future of Minnesota.

Thank you to Chair Fateh and all members of this committee for taking the time to read my story and consider my thoughts. Your consideration of what I have shared with you in this testimony, as well as the personal/individual impact along with the far-reaching impact for those who want/need to seek higher education, how that affects the great state of Minnesota and the North Star Promise does and can continue to play a role in positively impact the course of so many futures as a whole is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

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## **Citations**

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