



Chair Moe, Chancellor Olson, and Trustees:

Thank you for the opportunity to speak this afternoon. The 2023-2024 school year seems to be off to a successful start and I've heard all good things from our campuses on my various campus Labor Managements the last few months. Enrollments are up for the most part, students are back on campus, parking lots are full, athletics are doing well, and there seems to be a renewed investment in higher education in Minnesota, thanks to our governor and legislators. Now is the time where Minn State will be formulating their proposed supplemental budget and we know, as a collective, the number will be staggering. Trying to make up for what we didn't get last session from our ask, is a lot of money. But we also know we aren't going to get our full ask, no matter what the price tag. If we need \$61 million, and we have the right legislative makeup currently and a great partnership with the bargaining units, Minn State, Board of Trustees, and legislators, we need to ask for more, and hope that we get exactly what we need. The future of our students, institutions, employees, state, and higher education depends on that supplemental budget. While our investment from the legislators was historic it still lends to a large drop off come FY25 that our colleges and universities will need to figure out how to adjust for and in a lot of cases, at least for AFSCME, that means a lack of staff and a loss of jobs.

Another topic that is burning up the phone lines for AFSCME is that our institutions, we are finding, were ill-equipped to handle the new contract language finally expanding tuition waiver for our employees to further their education, with no barriers around the level of institution they work at. Our AFSCME employees were so excited to hear this – we have been fighting for this for 25 years. Disappointingly, however, we are finding that the campuses were not prepared to approve such tuition waiver requests, because there is no budget for it, or no process created for it. In fact, I'm hearing from some presidents, the process to decide if someone's request should be granted will come down to what that employee will give back to the campus, if they plan to stay at the campus, and whether their job performance deserves it. And dependents wanting to use the tuition waiver will likely be turned down no matter what. That was not the result years of fighting for our rights and benefits was meant for. Our two-year frontline staff have as much right as anybody else in the system to be able to go on and further their education. It is time for us to be held to the same level as our coworkers and other bargaining units. We have heard over and over again from both Devinder and now from Chancellor Olson that the frontline staff are imperative to our schools and our students, but yet that does not come through the decisions about tuition waiver and having the same equitable access to education. Our system presidents need to do better, and there needs to be a directive from the system office that they need to figure it out and make it equitable. If an employee has 20 years of service into Minnesota State and wants to further their education and promote to a different bargaining unit or position within the system, that doesn't deserve a denial of the tuition waiver request just because they may not be staying at that campus. They're still

within the system and that is still the right of the employee, especially when we work for an educational system.

This is a conversation that doesn't start and end here, and I welcome any questions or conversations you would like to have to figure out a process that keeps tuition waiver decisions as equitable as possible. I know that we are not the only bargaining unit that has these concerns and MAPE is running into the same issues, so it is not just one bargaining unit against the others. We need to remember that we work for a higher education system and we all deserve to better our lives.

Thank you, Chair Moe, Chancellor Olson, and Board of Trustees for your time and attention this afternoon.