May 4, 2015

The Honorable Terri Bonoff
Capitol, Room 325
75 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard
Saint Paul, Minnesota, 55155

Dear Senator Bonoff:

On behalf of the University of Minnesota, I want to thank you and your committee members for how accessible you have been to my staff and me during this legislative session. We hope we have not only answered your questions but also effectively told the story of the University of Minnesota and its positive impact on the entire State. The University’s partnership with the State of Minnesota is critical to both the state and the University, and we take your input seriously when guiding the future of this great institution.

As the Higher Education Conference Committee begins its work, we want to reaffirm our position on certain legislation, pointing out what we support and offering constructive feedback on a few remaining issues of concern. The following represents our view of the key features of these omnibus bills.

We strongly support the Senate positions on increasing funding for operations at the University. It ensures that we will not have to ask our Minnesota students and their families for an increase in tuition over the next two academic years to fund inflationary, ongoing expenses. Without full funding of our request of $65.2 million, we will need to increase tuition for students and families over the next two academic years.

We also strenuously support the Senate position of a $25 million investment in the Medical School, which will allow the University to hire exceptional faculty who are experts in curing and treating disease and illness prevalent in Minnesota and the nation. This infusion of talent will increase the school’s national prominence and rankings in both teaching and research and help keep our citizens healthy. Our hope is for the full request of $30 million.
We are grateful to the House for recognizing needs at our Crookston and Morris campuses. However, it is our practice that the Board of Regents directs funds and decides priorities among all the campuses and the many competing needs of the entire University of Minnesota system. Our preference is for these funds to be allocated to the University’s operations and maintenance budget.

We support the Senate language related to implementing recommendations to improve our human subjects research program. We will be open and transparent as we make necessary improvements and welcome ongoing monitoring of our progress. We will keep the Legislature informed of this important implementation work.

On the Senate request for a Budget Allocation Report, it is the University’s view that a request of this type does not need to be in statute. The University is responsive to individual legislator’s requests and we strive to be transparent to all about our budget and allocation decisions. We will produce such a report at the request of any legislator.

We support the work of both the House and Senate on Campus Sexual Assault legislation, and while there are a few clarifications and details of the legislation that need to be worked out in conference committee, we appreciate this legislation which brings more clarity, uniformity, and thoroughness to Minnesota’s higher education institutions’ response to this critical issue.

We fully support the idea of disclosing important information about institutional costs, expected graduation time, and average debt to ensure that prospective students and families make informed higher education choices. However, the current new Senate language only adds a reporting requirement to existing statute and includes reporting data that we do not currently have, such as job, salary, and wage information of all graduates. This requirement will place an expensive and undue administrative burden on our institution. We will continue to work on this provision in the days ahead.

We support the House’s College Completion language and believe that it is in both the University’s and our students' best interest to help students get needed guidance throughout their academic experience and complete their course work as quickly as possible.

The Senate language on Concurrent Enrollment creates an undue administrative burden. Specifically, managing and convening proposed new advisory boards of such large size will create staffing burdens and new expenses, particularly for our Crookston and Duluth campuses.
Lastly, I want to add our support for the Senate language on the TCF Stadium Refinance authorization allowing the University to take advantage of historic low interest rates and reduce costs.

Thank you again for all of your work to help strengthen the University of Minnesota. Please don’t hesitate to contact me, or Erin Dady, special assistant for Government and Community Relations at 612-624-9022 or dady@umn.edu, for more information. We are ready to work with you to craft the best possible higher education bill and shepherd it through the conference committee process and on a successful conclusion to the session.

Sincerely,

Eric W. Kaler
President

EWK:ks

cc: Tom Bakk, majority leader, Minnesota Senate
    Katie Sieben, assistant majority leader, Minnesota Senate
    Richard Cohen, chair, Senate Finance
    Greg Clausen, vice chair, Senate Higher Education and Workforce Development
    Jeremy Miller, republican lead, Senate Higher Education and Workforce Development
    Kari Dziedzic, senate conferee on Senate File 5
    Kent Eken, senate conferee on Senate File 5
May 4, 2015

The Honorable Bud Nornes  
State Office Building, Room 471  
100 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard  
Saint Paul, Minnesota, 55155

Dear Representative Nornes:

On behalf of the University of Minnesota, I want to thank you and your committee members for how accessible you have been to my staff and me during this legislative session. We hope we have not only answered your questions but also effectively told the story of the University of Minnesota and its positive impact on the entire State. The University’s partnership with the State of Minnesota is critical to both the state and the University, and we take your input seriously when guiding the future of this great institution.

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Sincerely,

Eric W. Kaler
President

EWK:ks

cc: Kurt Daudt, speaker, Minnesota House of Representatives
    Joyce Peppin, majority leader, Minnesota House of Representatives
    Jim Knoblach, chair, House Ways and Means
    Marion O’Neill, vice chair, House Higher Education Policy and Finance
    Gene Pelowski, dfl lead, House Higher Education Policy and Finance
    Drew Christensen, house conferee on Senate File 5
    Glenn Gruenhagen, house conferee on Senate File 5