May 17, 2024

Speaker Melissa Hortman
Leader Lisa Demuth
Majority Leader Erin Murphy
Leader Mark Johnson

Dear Legislative Leaders,

As you begin the final hours of session, I urge you to reconsider the request to support your University of Minnesota. State funding for the University of Minnesota is not just an investment in our more than 68,000 students, 27,000 employees, and 622,000 alumni – it’s an investment in the entire state.

As one of America’s leading public research universities – and the state’s only tier one research university – we play a vital role in addressing the diverse needs of not only today’s Minnesotans, but future generations. Our groundbreaking research addresses critical and timely subject areas such as the current impact of H5N1 avian influenza on our farmers and their dairy cattle, as well as the nation’s milk supply; how we manage environmental changes that impact farming and the emerald ash borer to preserve our forests; aquatic invasive species prevention in our lakes; and clinical trials that have the potential to improve patient lives and outcomes, just to name a few.

Our graduates and employees are your doctors, pharmacists, dentists, nurses, and more, who provide the day-to-day care and lifesaving treatments you and your constituents depend on. That care includes every constituent, no matter their background or economic standing, as evidenced by the diverse and often underserved populations we consider it a privilege to care for at our Community University Health Care Center and other sites across the state.

Throughout the legislative session, students, alumni, faculty, and staff from every corner of the state have come together to share stories demonstrating how the University’s legislative requests will impact their lives and the well-being of all Minnesotans. In my tenure as Interim President, I am even more impressed than I was as the parent of several University of Minnesota students by the life-changing education, research, and engagement the University delivers in every county of the state.

You have an opportunity in these final hours of session to support the University’s required operational needs and core mission support that we need now. The University simply cannot continue to wait for future legislatures. During the 2023 legislative session, the University of Minnesota requested $45 million for FY25 to address inflationary cost increases. Because that request was unmet last session, we are again requesting $45 million to fund core operations for FY25. With no action on our outstanding budget request, the Board of Regents will consider the recommendation to increase resident tuition on the Twin Cities campus at 4.5 percent in addition to more than $17 million in cuts/reallocations just to keep up with inflation. Furthermore, the passage of legislation with significant fiscal impact, but no additional funding will further strain the University’s budget.
The University’s supplemental budget request for $45 million in core mission support will allow us to: implement lower tuition rate increases; keep campus spaces safe, functional, sustainable, and accessible; maintain student services; provide essential classroom equipment and supplies; provide fair compensation for our employees; and attract and retain top researchers.

I am also grateful for the conversations we have had this year around our $500 million request for Higher Education Asset Preservation and Replacement (HEAPR) projects in the bonding bill. However, the current proposal for $60 million, with additional requirements for projects, is challenging. At this level, the University’s $5.9 billion deferred maintenance backlog will continue to grow leading to more costly emergency repairs and unsafe working and learning environments. Currently, nearly 25 percent of facilities throughout the system are in poor or critical condition. This HEAPR backlog has increasing reverberations on student experiences, academic programs, research initiatives, outreach programs, and general competitiveness.

It has been an honor to serve as Interim President of the University of Minnesota. I appreciate your consideration of my comments here and stand ready to answer any additional questions you may have.

Regards,

Jeffrey M. Ettinger
Interim President

c: Members of the Minnesota Legislature
   Governor Tim Walz
   Lt. Governor Peggy Flanagan
   Commissioner Dennis Olson