May 6, 2016

The Honorable Richard Cohen
Minnesota Senate Building, Room 3235
95 University Avenue West
St. Paul, MN 55155

The Honorable Jim Knoblach
State Office Building, Room 453
100 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Chairs Cohen and Knoblach:

On behalf of the University of Minnesota, I want to thank you for considering the University’s supplemental budget request this legislative session. With state support, the University’s proposed initiatives would improve health care, economic innovation, and data security across our state. The future of Minnesota greatly depends on the strength of the partnership between our state and its only public research university.

As the Conference Committee on House File 2749 begins its work, I write to reaffirm the University’s positions on proposed provisions in the supplemental budget bill.

We strongly support the Senate’s proposal to fund the University’s Health Training Restoration ($5 million) and Mining Innovation Minnesota ($3.1 million) initiatives. Health Training Restoration would restore funding to two critical health programs throughout Minnesota: the Mobile Dental Clinic and family medicine clinical training, education, and research. The proposal also includes funding for geriatric initiatives. Funding for Mining Innovation Minnesota would allow the Natural Resources Research Institute to develop new technologies to extract and produce high value products, while minimizing environmental impacts on our land and water resources.
We are grateful for new funding for tuition relief ($13 million) in the Senate bill. This investment would eliminate next year’s planned increase of 2.5% for the Twin Cities undergraduate resident tuition rate and reduce next year’s resident undergraduate tuition rate for students on all campuses by $205, pending the Board of Regents’ approval.

We are disappointed that neither the House nor Senate proposals provide funding for our Cyber Security and Healthy Minnesota initiatives. The University’s current information technology network transports research, academic, fire/life/safety, and commercial data across the world. While the University will invest $59 million for equipment upgrades, state support for the University’s Cyber Security initiative ($19 million one-time) would be critical to meet the current and future needs of the network. The University also requests funding to support critical health care training, education, and services statewide ($5.75 million). Funding for the Healthy Minnesota initiative would support the Community University Health Care Clinic, which addresses health disparities and workforce needs, and addresses Greater Minnesota’s dentistry needs through creating a Rural Associate Program within the School of Dentistry.

The proposed House legislation on fetal tissue research raises concerns regarding the Board of Regents’ exclusive authority to direct the internal management of the University. In addition, this provision does not appropriate any resources to conduct the duties as required in the legislation.

We also are concerned about the House proposal to require the state’s mental health and developmental disabilities ombudsman to monitor the treatment of individuals participating in University of Minnesota Department of Psychiatry clinical drug trials. As I have said in my testimony at the Capitol, the University is committed to upholding the highest ethical standards in research practices involving human participants. We continue to report monthly to the legislature on the progress in implementing our work plan to improve research with human participants. We suggest the provision is not necessary.

The Senate bill contains a request for a Budget Allocation Report for the Duluth campus. It is the University’s view that a request of this type does not need to be in law. The University is responsive to individual legislator’s requests, and we strive to be transparent about our budget and allocation decisions. We will produce such a report at the request of any legislator.
Both the House and Senate bills create a collegiate recovery program on the Rochester campus. The Senate version provides $100,000 in new funding, while the House version directs the University to use existing funding. With $100,000 in new funding, the Rochester campus would be able to launch a small program next year.

Thank you again for all 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, 612-624-9022, dady@umn.edu, for more information. I look forward to continuing to work with you.

Sincerely,

Erin W. Kaler
President

cc: Tom Bakk, majority leader, Minnesota Senate
    David Hann, minority leader, Minnesota Senate
    Kurt Daudt, speaker, Minnesota House of Representatives
    Joyce Peppin, majority leader, Minnesota House of Representatives
    Paul Thissen, minority leader, Minnesota House of Representatives
    Senate conferees on House File 2749
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