Chairman Jay Cowles

Minnesota State Board of Trustees

30 East 7th Street

St. Paul, MN 55101

June 15, 2020

Chair Cowles;

The past twelve months have delivered several circumstances that if presented independently, would be challenging enough for our campuses and the System. The underfunding from the legislature, COVID-19, and the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis confront us all as we plan for the start of the 2020-21 academic year. Never in the history of the MinnState System have we had a more challenging and uncertain time.

During the 2019-2021 legislative biennium, the IFO partnered with the Board of Trustees, the Chancellor, both student organizations, and our colleagues in Labor to seek the funding that was necessary to freeze tuition. Although we were successful in securing additional investment from the State, the overall revenues fell short of what is needed to protect our students and campuses from the negative impacts of campus budget crises. The IFO recognizes the efforts of Chancellor Malhotra to keep our campuses financially whole while minimizing the burden on students. Therefore, we support his proposal to reallocate funds that will pay for a tuition freeze for the fall semester and thus, delay the 3% tuition increase until January 2021. This action is necessary to protect students from reduced course offerings, fewer opportunities to receive the support they need to succeed, and a diminishing quality of the educational experience we can offer. These resources will also be needed to help maintain a focus on the important work that needs to be done around the Equity 2030 goal set by the Chancellor. Without these resources, we will not be able to fulfill our mission and meet the demands of all those that rely on us for access to a better life.

Undoubtedly, the COVID-19 pandemic will greatly impact the teaching and learning experiences on our campuses, and it requires a collaborative effort to ensure our high-quality education is available to this generation of students. The health and safety of our students, faculty, and staff are the top priority in our planning strategies and the guidance and leadership coming from the Chancellor and the System Office personnel related to individual health concerns are greatly appreciated.

The horrific killing of George Floyd highlights the hollow in our social consciousness. The protest that have ensued underscore the racial disparities that exists in America and around the world; our societal structures have a long history of oppression, racism, and white supremacy. Higher Education in this country and the MinnState System are such structures that have historically demonstrated systemic suppression of black and brown people. The goals of closing the academic

equity gaps do not go far enough; we can recruit, retain, and graduate more indigenous people and people of color and not eradicate racism. George Floyd’s murder has focused a lot of attention on

Minnesota, it is incumbent upon us to be the agent of change for our students, the communities we serve, and for the state of Minnesota.

As a labor union, the IFO rejects the Police Officers Federation of Minneapolis (POFM) leadership’s falsification of union principles to protect members who perpetuate racist violence against the Minneapolis community. Such violence and racism have no place in unions. The labor movement is borne of the fight for all working people, especially those who alone have no power. We stand in solidarity with those traditionally marginalized members in our organization and we strive to facilitate their empowerment. We recognize that racism is systemic and we are committed to using this opportunity to examine ourselves as organization and our influence at MinnState universities, to call out racism where we see it, and to strive for meaningful structural change that will endure.

Respectfully submitted,

Brent Jeffers

President

Inter Faculty Organization