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## State Legislative Agenda

**This year, Students United is committed to advocating on behalf of policies at the state and federal level that increase affordability, widen access to basic needs, and encourage civic engagement among students.**

*Students United is an independent, non-profit organization funded and operated by students.*

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# State Legislative Agenda Overview

## Affordability

**Supporting Minnesota State's biennial budget request:** Students United stands in support of Minnesota State's biennial budget request that will be presented to the state legislature this year. This proposal represents a unique opportunity to address Minnesota's workforce development needs, while taking steps to increase higher education affordability by fully funding a tuition freeze for Minnesota's seven state universities.

**Supporting a Minnesota tax conformity bill:** This summer, President Biden and the U.S. Department of Education announced plans to cancel \$10,000 in student loan debt for borrowers earning \$125,000 or less per year. This decision also included an additional \$10,000 in forgiveness for borrowers who received Pell grants. While this loan forgiveness is not taxable income at the federal level, unfortunately, this relief would be taxed in Minnesota if action is not taken. That is why Students United is in strong support of a tax package that includes conformity to the federal tax code.

## Basic Needs

**Supporting efforts to end hunger on college campuses:** Too many students across our seven universities live with the daily burden of food insecurity, but we have the knowledge and ability to overcome this problem. That is why Students United is advocating for resources that will expand efforts to end hunger on college campuses.

**Supporting increased mental health resources:** Across our seven campuses, students have resoundingly called for more resources and access to mental health support. That is why Students United is prioritizing efforts to expand the scope and scale of mental health resources across our system.

**Supporting resources for period equity:** Widespread access to menstrual products is a basic need for our students. That is why Students United is requesting funds for our seven universities to offer menstrual products at no charge for students.

## Civic Engagement

**Empowering students' voices:** During this legislative session, Students United will advocate for policies which improve voter registration efforts on campus, including support for automatic voter registration. We also call upon legislators to increase the ease and efficiency of voting by expanding drop box locations and removing Minnesota's witness requirement on absentee ballots.



# Affordability

## Supporting Minnesota State's biennial budget request

Students United stands in support of Minnesota State's biennial budget request that will be presented to the state legislature this year. This proposal represents a unique opportunity to address Minnesota's workforce development needs, while taking steps to increase higher education affordability by fully funding a tuition freeze for Minnesota's seven state universities. Without this funding, tuition could rise another 3.5%.

Historically, Minnesota State has relied primarily on state appropriations and tuition to finance their operations. Written into statute, **Minnesota's legislature has set a goal of appropriating funds to cover 2/3 of the System budget**, with the other 1/3 coming from tuition. However, in recent years, the relationship has been closer to **50% coming from appropriations and 50% from tuition costs**. In effect, this has priced out too many students who otherwise would have pursued their education in Minnesota. By fully funding a tuition freeze, we can begin to increase affordability for prospective students, and ready the next generation of Minnesota's leaders and workers.

Minnesota State's biennial budget request is also an acknowledgment that Minnesota has unmet workforce needs that our system is uniquely positioned to address. This proposal would increase resources for workforce development scholarships, thereby increasing affordability for students pursuing career fields in high-demand sectors. Students United is supportive of Minnesota State's decision to expand eligibility to university students for the first two years of their education and increase the annual scholarship award amounts to \$3,500 for eligible students.

Minnesota State's budget request would devote resources to transfer scholarships, assisting students with financial aid who transfer from any Minnesota State college to a Minnesota State university, ensuring the continuation of emergency grants, and upgrading college and university equipment and learning environments.

## AT A GLANCE

This proposal will increase higher education affordability by fully funding a tuition freeze for Minnesota's seven state universities. **Without this funding, tuition could rise another 3.5%.**

Minnesota State's biennial budget request is an acknowledgment that Minnesota has unmet workforce needs that our system is uniquely positioned to address. **This request is an investment in the next generation of leaders and workers in Minnesota.**

This budget proposal will **support and streamline the process for transfer students within the Minnesota State system** by devoting resources to transfer scholarships, assisting students with financial aid who transfer from any Minnesota State college to a Minnesota State university.





# Affordability

## Supporting a Minnesota tax conformity bill

This summer, President Biden and the U.S. Department of Education announced plans to cancel \$10,000 in student loan debt for borrowers earning \$125,000 or less per year. This decision also included an additional \$10,000 in forgiveness for borrowers who received Pell grants.

As an organization, Students United has long advocated for student-borrower relief and is committed to pursuing greater equity and opportunity within higher education. President Biden's program represented significant progress towards that goal and was welcome news for the more than **43 million Americans burdened by student loan debt**.

Unfortunately, President Biden's program is currently being challenged in Court and the initiative has been paused until a final ruling can be rendered. Students United is disappointed in this development as it creates confusion and chaos for those counting on debt relief. As an organization, we believe firmly that the President's action is constitutional, and we are proceeding under the assumption that the decision of lower courts will be overturned.

If and when the pause is lifted, **this loan forgiveness will be taxable income in Minnesota if action is not taken**. That is why Students United is in strong support of a tax package that includes conformity to the federal tax code.

Like relief offered through the Paycheck Protection Program that was exempted from state tax during last year's legislative session, we encourage state lawmakers to act and prevent this targeted relief from becoming an unexpected tax hike on student loan-holders.

## AT A GLANCE

President Biden's student debt relief program was welcome news for the more than 900,000 Minnesotans burdened by student loan debt. **These borrowers across our state owe an average of \$254 each month.**

If President Biden's action is legally upheld, this loan forgiveness will be taxable income in Minnesota if action is not taken.

Like relief offered through the Paycheck Protection Program that was exempted from state tax during last year's legislative session, **we encourage state lawmakers to prevent an unexpected tax hike on Minnesotans.**



# Basic Needs

## Supporting efforts to end hunger on college campuses

**Too many students across our seven universities live with the daily burden of food insecurity, but we have the knowledge and ability to overcome this problem.** That is why Students United is advocating for resources that will expand efforts to end hunger on college campuses.

In a recent [study](#) from the University of Minnesota's School of Public Health, investigators found that **nearly a quarter of college students in Minnesota struggle with food insecurity**. When broken down by demographics, the realities become even more stark for marginalized communities. Even among first year students, 23% of survey participants screened positive for food insecurity. Additionally, this study revealed that **food insecurity rates did not vary between 2-year vs. 4-year or private vs. public institutions**. This undermines the mistaken perception of today's 4-year student as being supported by family and campus resources.

The devastating consequences of food insecurity reverberate throughout a student's life. In the University of Minnesota study, **students identified as experiencing food insecurity were "more likely to experience nearly every other health risk factor examined."**

Moreover, students combating food insecurity reported lower academic standing than food secure students.

We are pleased that Minnesota State's budget proposal includes funds to sustain and grow the Basic Needs Resource Hub, which will assist food-insecure students. We are supportive of efforts to increase funding for Minnesota's hunger-free campus grant, administered by the Office of Higher Education. Funding for this program was included in last session's Conference Committee report on [H. F. 3872](#), and we are hopeful that legislators will again take action to address this need.

## AT A GLANCE

Nearly a quarter of college students in Minnesota struggle with food insecurity, and rates of food insecurity do not vary by institution type.

**Food insecure students suffer lower academic standing than their food secure peers and experience health risks at far greater rates.**

Minnesota State's budget proposal includes funds to sustain and grow the Basic Needs Resource Hub, which will assist food-insecure students. Students United is also advocating for **an increase in funding for Minnesota's hunger-free campus grant**, administered by the Office of Higher Education.



# Basic Needs

## Supporting increased mental health resources

Across our seven campuses, **students have resoundingly called for more resources and access to mental health support.** That is why Students United is prioritizing efforts to expand the scope and scale of mental health resources across our system.

While college is an exciting time for many students, it's also an environment that can produce many stressors that result in anxiety, depression, and a host of other mental health challenges. This is compounded by the fact that **75% of all lifetime mental health conditions** begin by age 24. In fact, the **2021 College Student Health survey**, conducted by the Minnesota Office of Higher Education, found that more than half of respondents reported having issues with their mental health, and suicide remains among the leading causes of death in Minnesota, particularly among college-age students. **This is a crisis that demands urgent action from lawmakers.**

In part, funding for the Basic Needs Resource Hub, included in Minnesota State's budget request, will help achieve this goal. Students United is also calling upon elected leaders to provide funding for this priority, like the language included in the 2019 Conference Committee report on **SF2419**, which was signed into law.

Additionally, Students United will seek partners in the legislature that are willing to work creatively to address the shortages of mental health professionals across our state. For example, during the last legislative session, Senator Draheim and Representative Pfarr authored **S.F. 42**. This bill would have established a loan forgiveness program for certain mental health professionals, thereby helping address issues of access for our universities.

## AT A GLANCE

**75% of all lifetime mental health conditions begin by age 24.**

The 2021 College Student Health survey found that more than half of respondents reported having issues with their mental health, and suicide remains among the leading causes of death in Minnesota.

With more robust funding, and creative solutions to address issues of access, **we have the capacity to tackle this crisis.**





# Basic Needs

## Supporting resources for period equity

**Widespread access to menstrual products is a basic need for our students.** That is why Students United is requesting funds for our seven universities to offer menstrual products at no charge for students.

During the last legislative session, a similar bill was introduced ([HF2750](#)) by Representative Feist and Senator Cwodzinski that applied to school districts and charter schools. Students United is calling upon the legislature to extend this language to the Minnesota State system. Students United is proud that Minnesota has exempted menstrual products from sales tax, but **the next step is to ensure widespread availability.**

People who menstruate can expect to [spend upwards of \\$1,000](#) over the course of their lifetime on menstrual products, and for too many students, this represents an unaffordable expense. This inequity is exacerbated by public health and nutritional benefits programs that exclude menstrual products and schools and workplaces that do not have uniformly available products.

As noted by Jennifer Weiss-Wolf in her book, *Periods Gone Public*: “In order to have a fully equitable and participatory society, we must have laws and policies that ensure menstrual products are safe and affordable for everyone who needs them. The ability to access these items affects a person’s freedom to work, study, stay healthy, and engage in the world with basic dignity. And if anyone’s access is compromised, whether by poverty or stigma or lack of education and resources, it is in our societal interest to ensure those needs are met.”

## AT A GLANCE

Students United is proud that Minnesota has exempted menstrual products from sales tax, but the next step is to ensure widespread availability.

**People who menstruate can expect to spend upwards of \$1,000 over the course of their lifetime on menstrual products.**

The ability to access menstrual products affects a person’s freedom to work, study, stay healthy, and engage in the world with basic dignity.



# Civic Engagement

## Empowering students' voices

Empowering students' voices and promoting civic engagement is a priority for Students United. According to data from the [Pew Research Center](#), nearly 20% of Minnesota's voter-eligible population in 2019 was between the ages of 18 and 29. With such a large portion of the electorate reflected on our campuses, ahead of the 2022 midterm elections, Students United worked closely with student-leaders, campus administrators, and the Minnesota State system office to register and turnout thousands of students to vote. **Our students recognize that active participation in our democracy is a fundamental responsibility, and that is why civic engagement is a priority for Students United.**

In addition to our Get-Out-The-Vote efforts throughout the midterm election cycle, Students United is committed to strengthening and improving Minnesota's election laws for future generations. During this legislative session, Students United will advocate for policies which improve voter registration efforts on campus, including support for automatic voter registration. We also call upon legislators to increase the ease and efficiency of voting by expanding drop box locations and removing Minnesota's witness requirement on absentee ballots.

**While Minnesota has historically been a high turn-out state, it has not kept pace with innovative policies that allow for greater access to the ballot box.** In fact, the [Cost of Voting Index](#) now ranks Minnesota 24th in the country in relative ease of voting. This can be attributed to the fact that Minnesota has not adopted more policies that remove barriers to voting such as automatic voter registration and the elimination of burdensome requirements.

## AT A GLANCE

According to data from the Pew Research Center, **nearly 20% of Minnesota's voter-eligible population in 2019 was between the ages of 18 and 29.**

The Cost of Voting Index now ranks Minnesota 24th in the country in relative ease of voting, because Minnesota has not adopted more policies that remove barriers to voting.

Students United is in support of policies which improve voter registration efforts on campus, including support for automatic voter registration, expanding drop box locations, and removing Minnesota's witness requirement on absentee ballots.