

February 7, 2011

Senator Greg L. Adams  
District 24  
State Capitol  
P.O. Box 94604  
Lincoln, NE 68509-4604

Dear Senator Adams and members of the Education Committee:

I am disappointed that I am not able to be with you today to express the University of Nebraska's opposition to LB 657 and our continued support for *all* Nebraska high school graduates who want to pursue the dream of an affordable college education in our state. The University of Nebraska has been a strong voice in favor of the current state policy since before its adoption in 2006, and on each occasion that unsuccessful attempts have been made to change it. Five years ago, Nebraska joined a group of states that have provided the opportunity for students who are not citizens or legal residents of the state to attend a public college or the university at resident tuition rates. Last fall, 48 of these students attended one of our four campuses (30 at UNO, 17 at UNK, 1 at UNL).

The ability of these young people to contribute to the economic growth of our state and to their own self-sufficiency depends in large measure on their ability to further their education. At a time when most state and national leaders agree that increasing educational attainment is key to our ability to compete effectively in the knowledge-based innovation economy, repealing a state law that promotes this goal is counterproductive at best.

The United States has lost its leadership position in the proportion of young adults with a college degree. A recent College Board report shows that in the last few years the U.S. has fallen to 12<sup>th</sup> among industrialized nations in the percentage of people ages 25 to 34 who have at least an associate's degree. The American workforce of tomorrow is losing ground against workers in other countries. We will regain our lead only by making higher education more accessible—not by closing the doors on students who are able and want to pursue a degree. Our strength as a nation is largely due to the opportunity we have provided to immigrants from across the globe to pursue economic success here, and I am convinced that our future success depends on this as well.

Recently, the National Conference of State Legislatures in collaboration with the College Board kicked off a year-long campaign to improve college completion rates. NCSL's initiative is similar to one announced earlier by the National Governor's Association, which Governor Heineman vice chairs, called "Complete to Compete".

The objective of these activities is to reach the goal of having 55 percent of Americans with a postsecondary degree by the year 2025. Currently, Nebraska is among the top ten states in the country in high school graduation rates but only 18<sup>th</sup> in college-going. And we are below the national average in overall educational attainment with just under 40 percent of Nebraskans with an associate's degree or higher and only 27 percent with a bachelor's degree or higher.


Increasing educational attainment is not only essential to the strength of our state and nation, it is also one of the most important predictors of an individual's economic success, quality of life, and productive engagement in society. There is a million-dollar difference, over a lifetime, between the earning capacity of a high school graduate and a college graduate. Also, research shows that people who go to college are healthier, are more likely to volunteer and to participate in their communities, and are less likely to be incarcerated and rely on public assistance.

Since 1982, federal law has required states' public schools to educate children regardless of their immigration status. We should not deny these same students who have attended Nebraska high schools the opportunity to attain an affordable postsecondary education. Prior to the passage of LB 239, undocumented students likely would have been classified as international students and required to pay nonresident tuition, which can be two to three times the resident tuition rate. But the more likely scenario is that many of them would not have been in a position to attend college at all since they are ineligible for federal and state financial aid.

The main purpose of offering resident tuition is to encourage undocumented students to stay in high school, graduate, and go on to college. The current drop-out rate nationally for undocumented immigrant high school students is around 50 percent. These objectives are entirely consistent with goals of the Nebraska P-16 Initiative: to improve Nebraska's high school graduation rate to 90 percent; to improve Nebraska's college-going rate to the top-10 tier nationally; and to provide affordable access for Nebraska students to attend Nebraska's postsecondary institutions.

In 2005, the Board of Regents of the University of Nebraska adopted a policy in support of the extension of postsecondary educational opportunity to undocumented immigrant children who meet the conditions established in current state law. Following passage of legislation in 2006, the Board amended its policies to conform to state law and allow undocumented students to pay in-state tuition rates. It is in the best interest of our state to keep the current law in place so more students will graduate from high school, attend college, improve their quality of life, and contribute to the economic growth of Nebraska and our nation. We urge the Education Committee not to advance LB 657 and to keep the dream of an affordable college education alive for all Nebraska students.

Sincerely,



James B. Milliken  
President