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Dear Chair McClure,

On behalf of Corporation to Develop Communities of Tampa, Inc. (CDC of Tampa) I want to sincerely thank you for your leadership and service to the people of Hillsborough County and the state of Florida. Your commitment to ensuring our communities remain places where families can succeed and businesses grow is truly appreciated.

As an employer serving residents across the Tampa Bay area, including Hillsborough County, we see firsthand the importance of having a strong, reliable healthcare workforce to meet the growing needs of our community. Institutions like Keiser University have long played a critical role in preparing students for these in-demand careers, and many of those students stay right here in our region after graduation, contributing to the health and well-being of our neighbors.

I'm writing to respectfully share our concern regarding the proposed changes to the EASE Grant in the House budget. The new eligibility metrics would disqualify many students pursuing healthcare careers at institutions we rely on, making it even more difficult to fill critical positions at a time when demand continues to rise. These students aren't just numbers, they're future nurses, radiologic technologists, respiratory therapists, and medical assistants, many of whom come from Hillsborough and choose to stay and serve their communities.

Florida's longstanding commitment to school choice in higher education has given these students the opportunity to select programs that meet both their personal needs and career goals. Restricting access to EASE would not only limit opportunity but also weaken the very workforce pipeline we depend on to keep our healthcare system strong.

We are grateful for your leadership and respectfully ask for your continued support in preserving full funding for the EASE Grant without restrictive new criteria. Protecting this program is essential to sustaining both Florida's healthcare infrastructure and the broader principle of educational opportunity that has made our state a leader in workforce development.

Thank you again for your service and steadfast commitment to the people of Hillsborough County and the state of Florida.

Lafe Eastman

Lafe Eastman

Dir. of Business Development and Community Engagement