

Senate Appropriations Committee  
115 State Street  
Montpelier, VT 05633-5301

April 20, 2023

Dear Senate Appropriations,

Thank you for inviting the Vermont State Colleges System to testify on our Fiscal Year 2024 appropriations requests. As you heard, our ongoing, shared work to transform, modernize, and stabilize the Vermont State Colleges System is significant, and we are making progress to achieve the vision laid out for us by the state.

You asked a few questions that we would like to follow up on. Additionally we would like to provide clarity about the proposal to lower Community College of Vermont's (CCV's) tuition.

### **Community College of Vermont Tuition Reduction**

In the committee meeting, there was some confusion about whether the House funded the request in General Fund base dollars or in one-time funds. We would like to clarify that the request is for one-time funds and that we are requesting that the Senate consider funding this proposal at \$10 million over two years, as proposed by the Governor.

CCV works closely with partners across the state to deliver education for employers and agencies, provide transfer pathways for students seeking a bachelor's or higher degree, and to deliver innovative, valued programs for the state's workforce needs. This tuition reduction is also important to Vermont partners looking to invest in their employees.

Let me give you an example. We have recently connected with a healthcare provider in the northeast part of the state that is looking to partner with a community college to provide further training to their employees. They are considering a community college in New Hampshire because of cost: the tuition for that college is less than CCV. A lower tuition allows our Vermont business to invest locally in their need for employee training and education and not partner with organizations outside of Vermont.

The Governor's proposal for tuition reduction at CCV is for \$10 million over two years. Anecdotally, if the proposal was in place this spring semester at CCV, it would benefit 3,000 students with their education costs and be applied to career ready programs in allied health, childcare, information technology, cybersecurity, and more.

The House approved \$4 million toward this tuition proposal. With this approach, we would need to consider a smaller approach than this proposal's impact originally envisioned. This would result in significantly less students impacted and a reduction in the career ready programs that would be served.

The 802 Opportunity Grant, administered by VSAC, has been a transformative program for Vermont families earning under \$75,000; however, we have many Vermonters who earn more than \$75,000 and cost face the barrier of cost.

For example, a family of four in Vermont earning \$80,000 is ineligible for 802 Opportunity but they do not have discretionary income to invest in education. We believe these programs together represent a significant investment that the state is making toward our workforce goals which will increase enrollment, increase the pipeline of skilled workers in Vermont, and benefit business, industry, and essential services like health care and human services.

### **Vermont Technical College's Agriculture Program Enrollment**

The Committee requested information on enrollment in the Agriculture programs. Vermont Technical College (soon to be part of Vermont State University) currently has three agriculture programs: Agribusiness Management Technology (Associate of Science), Dairy Farm Management Technology (Associate of Science), and Diversified Agriculture (Bachelor of Science). In 2020, Vermont Tech began a planning process to transform the agriculture and food systems degrees offered.

The current agricultural program has seen a steady decline in enrollment since 2017. In the 2021-2022 academic year, nine students were enrolled across the three current programs. These programs were suspended in Spring 2022 in anticipation of continued work on the design and launch of the new programs, and a teach-out process for currently enrolled students was begun. Currently 3 students are enrolled in the programs.

The Vermont Tech agriculture program transformation is underway. The institution has secured funding for several re-design projects, including \$387,000 from the Legislature to assist with the development of a skilled meat cutter training and apprenticeship facility in Act 183 of 2022, as well as several other state and federal grants.

### **Retention Trends**

The Committee asked about Vermont State Colleges System retention trends ([Slide 21](#)). We would like to clarify that students who move from full-time to part-time enrollment are counted in the retention rates shown on the slide. Additionally, the one-year retention trend on this slide only shows first-time, full-time students, meaning it tracks data only from students that do not come to college with existing credit from any postsecondary institution and enroll initially as full-time students. This data offers a snapshot of a specific subset of students, not all VSCS students.

### **Retention of Students in Critical Occupations Programs**

The Vermont State Colleges System has seen strong retention of students enrolled in critical workforce programs, as well as those students who received Critical Occupations Scholarships funded by the legislature. Almost every student who received a scholarship has graduated from or persisted in the programs. Additionally, we are seeing significant increases in enrollment in programs including in our Master of Science in Clinical Mental Health Counseling programs, Nursing programs on all levels, and Early Childhood Education programs on all levels.

### **Program Requests**

Finally, we would like to suggest that the language for the Certificate in 3-D Technology (Section 15 of H.484) be updated to "In fiscal year 2024 the amount of \$1,500,000.00 is appropriated from the

General Fund to the Vermont State Colleges to establish a Certificate in 3-D Technology program in partnership with the Advanced Manufacturing Center at Vermont State University.”

Thank you for inviting us in to testify last and for the opportunity to submit additional thoughts to the committee.

Respectfully,

Katherine

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