

Ways and Means testimony from fraternal organizations on S.221
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April 20, 2014

As a UVM graduate and past president of Tri Delta sorority, I am deeply concerned about the bill to repeal the tax exemption for the sorority and fraternity houses at the University of Vermont. At the same time that I recognize the magnitude of the task before you in reviewing all exemptions, I believe this exemption would have effects that are counter-productive to your long term goals of maintained or increased revenue.

Over the past several years, I have attended reunion weekends not only for my own 5-year reunions but also as a participant at the open houses and annual House Corporation meetings at Tri Delta during reunion weekend. The open house at the sorority typically generates 40 or more alumnae coming through the door. The house itself is the largest draw as it offers a memorable place to gather and reminisce. Sorority and fraternity life as a focal point for reunion attendance has also been evidenced in the response to my upcoming 40th reunion, for which I am the co-chair. The overall response from class members has been luke warm to say the least, but the response from Tri Delta alums has been enthusiastic. Since the University's goal is to attract as many alumni as possible to campus for reunion weekend, it is critical to recognize the important role the Greek houses play in this endeavor. I believe it is not only the bond of life-long friendships formed in a fraternity or sorority, but also the idea of returning to the home away from home that contributes to the strong return rate of members of Greek organizations.

While I was an undergraduate at UVM, I was a member of the tennis team. Whereas I had several friends on the tennis team, I do not identify with that affiliation as an alumna. I do, however, remain very connected to Tri Delta sorority, both the organization and the physical house. I have spent several hours painting and cleaning at the house and have offered support to the Collegiate Chapter in their fund-raising efforts. For example, last fall I convinced one of our alumnae, the well-known artist Candace Lovely, to donate a print to be raffled off at reunion weekend with the proceeds going into the chapter philanthropic funds. In ways such as these, the alumnae remain connected to the purpose of Tri Delta, which includes developing the "qualities of unselfish leadership".

Fraternity and sorority houses are residential learning communities that cannot be replicated in apartments. Collegians who are members of Greek organizations benefit from countless hours of volunteer mentoring from advisors and House Corporation members and form out-of-class relationships that are not found in the campus residence halls or in apartments. So, I urge you not to attempt to equate living in a fraternity or sorority house with living in an apartment. It is not an equitable experience.

Lastly, to maintain the house, House Corporation relies almost entirely on the rent paid by the chapter, which comes from a portion of the dues and from room fees. The burden of property tax would therefore have to be passed on to the students. This could well result in a decrease in membership and/or an eventual loss of ownership of our historical house. As with most non-profit organizations, the focus of the sorority is on community service, and the extent of that service would be significantly diminished if not lost in the process.

As a loyal University of Vermont alumna and a member of Tri Delta, I ask that the committee not approve the repeal of the tax exemption for fraternity and sorority property at the University of Vermont. To do otherwise risks the loss of a vital part of the fabric of life at UVM.

Respectfully,
Emily S. Manders