

Testimony to the House Committee on Education

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Thank you so much for agreeing to hear my testimony. My name is Linda Olson and I am a faculty member at Castleton State College and the President of the VSC Faculty Federation. I am here to ask you to support S. 40 which would establish a committee to come up with policy suggestions to return state funding for the VSC back to the 1980 level. According to VSC data, in 1980 51% of the VSC revenue came from the state appropriation to the VSC and 49% came from student tuition. Today, 18% of the VSC revenue comes from the state, while 82% comes from student tuition. If you look at the most recent State Higher Education Executive Officers (SHEEO) data, Vermont currently ranks last in state and local support for higher education per full time equivalent student. Based on this same data Vermont also has the highest level of family share contribution for higher education.

This funding model is unsustainable and leads to Vermont students paying one of the highest in-state tuitions in the country. That also means that they graduate with one of the highest averages for student loan debt. In my 19 years at Castleton the VSC has consistently had to go to the Board of Trustees with hat in hand asking them to approve yet another increase in student tuition in order for the VSC to maintain the quality education it provides. We are at a crossroads. We can no longer support the VSC on the backs of our Vermont students and we can't continue to maintain high quality education without funding. At a time when some form of post high school education is necessary for financial success and stability, affordable public higher education is more important than ever. I am asking that you support S. 40 and commit to figuring how to make public higher education affordable to students while maintaining the high quality of the VSC.

I am asking you do this because the health and well-being of our state depends on it. Remember, 84% of our graduates stay and work and raise their families in Vermont. Our graduates are teachers, social workers, farmers, and small business owners in Vermont. To find ways that our students, faculty, staff and alumni contribute to Vermont please check out our Facebook page at www.facebook.com/reclaimthepromise. In 1961, the VSC was established with enabling legislation that promised to support the VSC: "in whole or substantial part." We are asking the state honor that promise, because an investment in public higher education is an investment in Vermont. Please support S. 40.