



ALPHA CHAPTER OF THE SIGMA PHI SOCIETY
420 COLLEGE STREET, BURLINGTON, VT 05401
FOUNDED 1845

April 21, 2014

Dear Sir or Madam,

We write you today regarding Vermont House Bill S.221, specifically the portion repealing 32 V.S.A. § 3802(5). It is our view that this effort to strip Greek organizations including Sigma Phi of property tax exemptions under Vermont law is misguided and will result in substantial harm while failing to achieve its policy goal. As the Board of the corporation that owns the Sigma Phi house on College Street we felt it proper to convey the thoughts of our chapter and 600 living alumni in Vermont and elsewhere.

Fundamentally, we believe that this change in status would not only result in the elimination of the 175-year old Greek tradition at UVM, but it would also result in a net economic loss for the state which would be inordinately felt in Burlington and Chittenden County.

The stated rationale for the bill is that it would create "parity" for all students, in that students who live off campus must pay their rent to a landlord who pays property taxes. We find this rationale lacking for the following reasons:

- Comparing students living in Greek houses with those students paying rent to for-profit landlords selectively ignores the thousands of students that live on campus in tax-exempt University housing. Fraternity and sorority houses are far more analogous to university housing, as both provide housing for students on a nonprofit basis.
- There is a very real obligation for Greeks to contribute to the community which does not exist for non-Greeks. This does not strike us as reflective of the parity that this bill seeks. Similarly, those who live in private homes off campus pay rent to a for-profit landlord or company: the same is not the case for Greek houses, which are owned by non-profits. These non-profits are organized under state and federal law as such because the state recognizes the charitable purpose for which they were founded and which they serve: this does not apply to students living in private quarters off-campus.
- Other students, collectively, do not contribute to the economic or social welfare of the state to the same degree that Greeks do. Independent Sector, a leadership network for nonprofits, estimates the economic impact of one hour of community service in the State of Vermont at \$21. It is estimated that Greeks at UVM contributed over 21,000 hours of community service last year, with an estimated net economic impact of \$454,650. This reflects a significant difference between the amount of property taxes that would result from this bill (which we believe to be \$0 for reasons stated below).

- Pragmatically, this bill will not create additional revenue or parity for the state. The inevitability of this bill is that it will mean a sale of Greek houses to UVM or Champlain, removing them from the tax rolls and excising a significant source of economically valuable volunteerism from the state and local economy. The result will not be parity for anyone; rather, it will be a net-loss of hundreds of thousands of dollars for the state and for the city of Burlington.

Needless to say, we hope that you will consider these factors when making a final determination on how to proceed with this Bill.

Thank you for the opportunity to have our voices heard; we would welcome additional dialogue on this matter at your convenience.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "V. Noah Campbell". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

V. Noah Campbell
President, Alpha Chapter of the Sigma Phi Society

CC:

David G. Sweeney

Kevin P. Smith

Blake P. Browne

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