

My name is Sarah Loveless and I am a Corrections Educator with Community High School of Vermont (CHSVT) at the Barre Probation and Parole Community Campus. In recent weeks, cuts have been proposed that will drastically reduce educational services that are currently provided by CHSVT. I am here to ask you to oppose cuts to CHSVT and preserve the irreplaceable educational services that the school provides to students throughout Vermont.

The students we serve have generally been faced with incredible obstacles in their lives; many are entrenched in generational poverty, born into families where education is not valued or supported, enter the correctional system at a very young age, become addicted to substances early in life, and bring children into this world that they cannot economically or emotionally care for. Education is their *only* way out of this cycle of poverty and criminal behavior. I have seen, time and time again, CHSVT transform the lives of those who society so often deems as “hopeless”.

CHSVT is uniquely equipped to address the unique needs of this population. There is a mistaken notion that Community High School of Vermont duplicates services that are already provided by other adult learning services. Prior to teaching at CHSVT, I taught within a Transitional Jobs Program in Barre, which helped women with criminal backgrounds obtain the skills they needed to find employment and become self-sufficient. Part of my position was connecting women to educational and training opportunities that were essential to their long-term success. Those women who I referred to CHSVT were, in every case, the only ones who ultimately completed their high school diplomas. Many others chose to pursue other adult education options, such as Central Vermont Adult Basic Education, but the unique barriers faced by the corrections population were simply not adequately addressed in those educational settings. CHSVT instructors are trained to handle the unique behavioral, emotional, and educational challenges of the corrections population, and the presence of CHSVT campuses throughout the state means that students can work toward their educational goals while incarcerated as well as when they are released and ready to rebuild their lives. CHSVT provides truly individualized instruction that also takes into account their vocational success beyond high school; creating and supporting “transition” or “Living, Learning, Working” plans is one of my favorite aspects of my position. Often, for the first time in their lives, students begin to build short and long-term goals for becoming self-sufficient.

I recognize that the budget shortfall requires difficult sacrifices to be made, but please consider the fact that cutting educational services for corrections populations will ultimately end up costing the state considerably more. As I have already mentioned, education and employment is the only way out of the correctional system and off of public assistance. Studies have shown a clear correlation between correctional education and a reduction in recidivism of 43%.

I urge you to support CHSVT and vote against any proposed cuts to this vital program. Thank you for your time.

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