

VERMONT LICENSED PLUMBERS ASSOC. (VLPA)

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To the Hearing committee members, fellow advocates, and all Vermonters in general:

I am Brad Talbot and I am director of the Vermont Licensed Plumbers Association. We provide licensed Plumbers and certified GAS and Fuel Oil technicians with state approved continuing education unit (CEU) training classes required for renewal. This is our 20th year of using the VIT distance learning network.

Over those 20 years, nothing has shaken our belief that the ready access and helpful number of VIT sites throughout Vermont provides the perfect venue for continuing education classes in this rural state. For example, it's not unusual to have the VIT site in Newport and the site in Bennington (or Brattleboro) both involved in a typical class presentation. Attendees need only arrive at start time, sign in, pick-up the class handout, and attend the classes. We use 9 of the VIT sites and, on average, activate 5 sites per class session. Owing to VIT's flexibility, over the course of a year's time, we are able to rotate site activation, so that each particular site will be active and providing class at least 3 times per year. By rotating site activation, we can offer our target audience choices concerning class content and attendance dates. Additionally, the VIT network's size allows us to keep attendee drive times to no more than 30 minutes. This fact is ideal for dealing with rural Vermont and its often inclement weather. VIT's network is truly interactive; at each site, attendees have microphones available for questions during the PowerPoint presentation. VIT's network is reliable. On our own count, within the last 5 years, not one site has been compromised for longer than 15 minutes due to technical difficulties. Above all, VIT's technology provides clear and unwavering video and audio reception. This is a fact very much appreciated by our target audience.

We use the VIT network for 9 months out of 12 each year. The numbers tell the tale of success. For example, summarizing our VIT use during the last three years, we have instructed a total of 1,550 attendees. On average, we instruct 57 attendees per class date. While it is true that other technologies, such as wireless 'Skype' and Apple are available, they are no match for VIT's current technology and will not be on par with VIT in the foreseeable future. Will someone please tell me how to 'Skype' an average of 57 attendees per class? Add to that, keeping the 'Skype' interactive for four hours without a 'flicker' or 'hiss'? No other current technology in Vermont and, for that matter - New England, can come close to VIT's dependability, clarity, and efficiency.

My job allows me to interact with a large percentage of Vermont licensed Plumbers, heating technicians, gas, and fuel oil technicians. I became aware of the zero funding of VIT on Monday, since then I have spoken with over a dozen licensees concerning this issue. Out of deference to everyone's sense of propriety, I will not repeat any of the content of those conversations. In summary though, let me say that none of them were supportive of the de-funding.

My previous statements illustrate a small amount of the enormous benefit provided by VIT to both my Association and those who we serve. I'm sure you have heard from many others whose education programs would be eviscerated by closing VIT. To that end, I'm sure Tara Lidstone, VIT's Executive Director, has provided testimony and materials describing the scope of VIT's inherent value to thousands of Vermonters. What is important now, is that we all get on the same page and work to restore the funding so necessary to keep Vermont's technological 'crown jewel', VIT, fully functional. This is to the benefit of us all. And, it's the right thing to do.