

Rebecca Buck

From: George Cross <gccrossvt@hotmail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, March 11, 2015 7:10 PM
To: Andy Pallito
Cc: Justin.Johnson@state.vt.us; Hal.Cohen@state.vt.us; Rebecca.Holcombe@state.vt.us; Charlie Enscoe; Kenneth Bruno; Marjorie Zunder; Penny Carpenter; Rebecca Buck; Sue MacMartin; Theresa Utton; Brian Vachon; Carol Bokan; Daniel Alcorn; David Luce; George Cross; Jason Gibbs; Offie Wortham; Richard Fraser; Sara Flynn; Dana Lesperance; Gerald Schartner; Sheila Sayah; Troy Mcallister; Wilhelmina Picard
Subject: CHSVT Budget Reductions

MEMO

To: Anthony Pallito, Commissioner of Corrections

From: George Cross, Chair, CHSVT State Advisory Board

Date: March 12, 2015

Re: CHSVT Budget Reductions

This memo is written on behalf of the CHSVT State Advisory Board. The Board has been greatly concerned about the impact of the severe budget reduction proposed in the Administrations' 2016 budget. Unfortunately there has been no outreach to the Board about the proposed reduction. This is a disappointment, as the Board has a long history of supporting the efforts of the school and the Department of Corrections, beginning with the formation of the school with the help of many of Vermont's retired educators. Retired teachers often talk about their great pride in contributing to initiating the school. They speak elegantly about the school being an approved independent school in Vermont and a school that is accredited by the NEASC. Vermont's retired teachers are especially proud of the achievements of the many graduates of CHSVT and the hundreds of skill certificates awarded to students over the years. Great effort and time has been donated by volunteers and board members to create an educational program that is second to none in this country. The school has been sustain by a caring set of administrators and teachers devoted to helping a special population of students to prepare for living in an ever-changing society.

We understand that the state faces difficult financial times. We have assumed that CHSVT would have to struggle with a small budget reduction similar to that facing all state programs.

However, the Board is most concerned about the students. Vermont has no upper age limit for attending high school. State law **requires** those under the age of 23 who do not have a high school diploma and are under the supervision of DOC to attend CHSVT. Both federal and state law **requires** that those under the age of 22 who need special education services receive those services at public expense. These are fundamental rights which are not extinguished simply because one is incarcerated or otherwise under the supervision of DOC. Many CHSVT students were not well served in schools before their contact with DOC. This, too, does not limit their right to an equal education. There is no provision in law that we are aware of which conditions this right to an equal education on the bases of funding being available or the demands of other state services for reduced resources. Consequently, the Board is concerned about the legal risks which accrue to the state when individual legal rights are arbitrarily abridged.

You, of course, are well versed in the role that a sound basic education and career skills development play in the reduction of recidivism. The Board applauds the efforts of DOC for its work to continually develop and improve reentry programs of all types. CHSVT is a vital component of this effort. Working together we are confident that ways can be found to not only continue this good work, but to improve it.

The CHSVT State Advisory Board stands ready to fulfill its obligation outlined in Vermont statute to assist your office with structuring an educational program and the associated personal and career skills development needed by our students, the men and women that both you and we know need special attention if the state's mission is to help them become productive citizens in our communities. Everyone wins when a CHSVT student successfully transitions from the supervision of DOC to the real world of a Vermont city or town. That success depends on being ready and willing to accept a job that allows the individual to support himself/herself and his or her family. That success is predicated on many organizations, groups and individuals working together to support the programs needed by the students/citizens.

The CHSVT Board is prepared to work with all parties to ensure that CHSVT continues to provide strong programs designed to ensure successful reentry. How can we help you accomplish this?

Cc:

Justin Johnson, Secretary of the Agency of Administration

Hal Cohen, Secretary of the Agency of Human Services

Rebecca Holcombe, Secretary of the Agency of Education

Members of the House Committee on Appropriations

Members of the House Committee on Education

Members of the House Committee on Institutions and Corrections

Members of the Senate Committee on Appropriations

Members of the Senate Committee on Corrections

Members of the Senate Committee on Education

CHSVT State Advisory Board

CHSVT Administrative Team