

Testimony to the Appropriations Committee in favor of H122

My name is Steve Belitsos and I am a professor at Vermont Technical College in the Diesel Power Technology program. I share my skills with approximately 40 Vermont and greater New England students. After they graduate from VTC with an associate's degree, my students will receive a starting wage of between \$37,500 and \$50,000 yearly, usually with a comprehensive benefit package. Approximately 80% of my students are first-generation college students, 75% are Vermonters and a significant number of them have learning disabilities. My Vermont students stay in Vermont after graduation and a small percentage of out-of-state students also remain in the state. I have noticed that by 5 years after graduation, many of my students have purchased homes and are starting families.

I have lost several students as a result of high cost of tuition, fees and expenses, one last semester, but most of my students pay the freight, finish their education and join the workforce competent, confident and ready to perform. My students value their education and know that success in their chosen field will get them where they want to go in life. They are passionate about their career field and are extremely dedicated to it. I do not need to take attendance in my classes because my students are in their seats or in the lab every class, every day.

The biggest hindrance to my students getting the education for which they pay is a major deficiency in both the currency and the quantity of hardware (trucks, earthmoving equipment and agricultural equipment) in the lab. Since my students support 84% of the College's budget, they should have a reasonable expectation to have recent lab "iron" on which to learn the service procedures

that industry requires them to know. They should also have this hardware in sufficient numbers so that they are not required them to waste time waiting for a chance to practice a procedure.

Both the McClure Foundation and the US Dept. of Labor have declared Diesel service a high growth career field with above average wages. I can place 100% of my students in these high paying jobs but, as a result of the low level of support from the State of Vermont, my students graduate with extremely high student loan debt. In 1961, the enabling legislation that created the Vermont State Colleges, stated that the state would support the VSC system 'in whole or in substantial part'. Since 1980, the burden of higher education has been transferred to tuition. Vermont state funding of higher education, at a mere 16% of VSC revenue, is almost at the bottom of national rankings. This is unsustainable. I urge you to support Rep Matt Hill's bill, H122 which also reflects the Chancellor's request for \$4 million increase with an annual inflator.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

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