

Talking points for appropriations committee hearing, State House, 9:30 AM, Friday, March 3, 2017

Victor Ehly, CCV instructor

Speaking in favor of H.122 Appropriations for Vermont State Colleges sponsored by Matt Hill, Democrat from Wolcott, VT.

- My name is Victor Ehly, and I am an instructor for the Community College of Vermont.
- I am happy to be here this morning representing AFT Vermont. I am a volunteer working with VSC colleagues from all over the state on the “Reclaim the Promises” campaign for affordable higher education and to ask the legislature to fulfill its historic promise to fund higher education “in part or in whole” as stated in the 1961 enacting legislation of this great college system.
- Specifically, we are requesting that the Vermont State legislators support the request for a \$4million increase to the Vermont State College with an annual inflator as it is presented in H.122. We cannot continue to pass the burden of funding our system onto backs of students and their families.
- According to Vermont State Colleges (VSC) data, state support for higher education has steadily declined in the past 34 years. In 1980 state appropriations provided 51% of VSC revenue while 49% came from student tuition. Today less than 16% of the VSC revenue comes from the state while more than 84% comes from student tuition. Our in-state tuition rates among the highest in the country and our state investment in public higher education ranks at the bottom nationally.
- The VCS Mission is (and I quote): “For the benefit of Vermont, the Vermont State Colleges system provides affordable, high quality, student-centered, and accessible education, fully integrating

professional, liberal arts, and career study, consistent with student aspirations and regional and state needs.”

- 84% of VSC students are Vermont residents. 57% of students of VSC are first generation.
- As my commitment to my academic discipline, to CCV, and to my wonderful students has grown over the years, I have become increasingly aware of the daily struggles of my students. It seems they are either only able to afford part-time study while working full time...sometimes at more than one job...or they are taking a full load and accepting the heavier and heavier load of debt while still working full time.
- CCV is the very beginning of the long and difficult ladder that students must climb to make a meaningful contribution to the state’s economy, to their own families, and to their chosen profession. Its two-year majors are designed to move them successfully into local and state-wide business and professional positions as well as serving as a feeder school for the four-year colleges in the state higher education system. The average age of a CCV student is 27 years old.
- The stress I see in my students is the grass-roots reality that reflects the stress the entire state-wide system is under.
- Dylan Blair, a Castleton University student who also attended CCV writes:

I have had the opportunity to speak with hundreds of students about their student [loan] debt and the effect it will have on their lives after graduating. The consensus amongst students is nearly unanimous. It is permeated with fear, anxiety and uncertainty. At Castleton more than half of the student body are paying their entire tuition exclusively through loans. The remainder of students pay through a variety of methods. Many students spend most of their free and vacation time working in an attempt to lessen this burden. Others have family who sacrifice what little disposable income they have to assist their children. No matter the method of payment or the amount of debt, one thing remains true. The cost of going to college is putting a gigantic and undue burden on both the students and families in our state, and because of this our state's economy is burdened as well. In a world where a college education is paramount to success, it is neither sustainable nor acceptable to place this burden solely on the shoulders of the youth of our state and their families, and it is a problem we must address.

- Please support H122. Let's show the students and families of Vermont that we're willing to stand by our promise for affordable public higher education in Vermont.