

Thank you for inviting our testimony. Everyone here has braved 14 or more inches of fresh snow to be here because we believe it is vital to support students by increasing higher education funding for Vermont public colleges.

My name is Morna Flaum. Since 2009 I have served as a part time faculty member of Johnson State College's education department. I am currently the Vice President of VSC Faculty Federation as well.

I support Chancellor Spaulding's request for a \$4 million increase to the Vermont State College System with an annual inflator. I urge you to support Representative Hill's bill H122 as a start toward easing the burden on Vermont State College students. Currently 84% of the running the colleges comes from our student's tuition. Frankly, this is not sustainable, especially when you take the larger view. Vermont is full of wonderful families, but many of our students come from financially difficult backgrounds. Our students are vulnerable and many cannot afford the substantial financial burden of financing their education. Most of my students juggle a job or two or even three while attending college and doing their best to learn. But even then they are anxious because no matter what they do to earn money while going to school their student loans mount. At least once or twice a year I have a student who needs to leave school, because they cannot sustain their studies while struggling to support themselves. Often they lose their courage in the

face of their ever mounting debt. Add to these anxieties their understandable exhaustion from spreading themselves so thin this financial burden can most definitely impact their success in their studies.

So a debt approach often isn't sustainable on an individual basis, but Vermont faces a larger scale of loss due to this lack of sustainability. The bigger picture is that we are fiftieth, the lowest in the country, when it comes to state support of our state higher education institutions. Our students have the highest in-state tuition in the country. That is much worse than being 49th or 48th, as we were for a time. We are dead last. As students face the higher tuition they might not be able to get an education when they most need it, when they are young and just starting out in life. That lack of options can breed bad choices, which could have a social cost that all of us will need to bear. Or our young people might leave the state for more options and better choices, which would also be a social cost for us.

Well, in some ways we are lucky because right now, about 83% of our students are Vermonters and 84% of our students stay to build their lives, use their hard earned education, and work here to benefit us. But a dynamic part of their futures is immediately compromised by their student debt. With student debt on their shoulders when will they be able to buy a house, pay

taxes, raise children in a safe and secure environment? As their lives suffer so will our communities and our economy.

The business climate suffers when we don't have an educated workforce, and we might find even further obstacles to inviting new companies and new employers to our state. . A complex society can only sustain itself by supporting higher education; it is the best way to maintain a sophisticated and successful adult population. A complex society needs a complex safety net.

As an active member of the VSC Faculty Fed I know that our faculty have worked long hours months and years to help find creative and forward thinking financial solutions to help Reclaim the Promise of Higher Education in Vermont. I urge you to support Representative Hill's bill H122 as a start toward easing the burden on Vermont State College students. However, the \$4 million plus an annual inflator promised by this bill is but one step towards a fuller solution to Vermont's sustainability issues. Yes, a good step, and one we support, but we remind you that we also hope to continue to work along side Jeb Spaulding, the Board of Trustees, and our supportive legislators to put into action some additional ideas, because the hole Vermont has dug for itself by consistently underfunding the VSC since the 1980s has gotten us into a difficult situation, as a state community that cares about bilding for the

future. So don't forget our other ideas, included on this flyer, such as Restricting the amount of Vermont financial aid that heads to out of state colleges and Universities. Limiting the drain of these funds from the state means that \$4.7 million goes back in to the state higher education institutes. If the Vermont legislature regulates and taxes the sale of marijuana, then the state should dedicate a portion of the anticipated revenue toward funding the Vermont State Colleges and the University of Vermont.

Allocate an additional 1% over the growth of the General Fund to fund higher education.

AFT Vermont supports the recommendation of the Act 148 Working Group.

That committee's report can be found here:

<http://legislature.vermont.gov/assets/Legislative-Reports/Act148-2014-Interim-Study-ofHigher-Education-Funding-FINALJan-22-2014.pdf>