

My name is Kathleen Moore and I teach at the Community College of Vermont here in Montpelier. I am also a “faculty coach” in the TRIO Program which supports first-generation and low-income college students to succeed in college. I am speaking here as a member of our CCV United Faculty union.

I applaud this committee for taking testimony on this very important matter.

As you know, Vermont regularly ranks at or near dead last in funding for higher education. What you might not know is that CCV serves the highest number of Vermonters in the state, and yet receives, proportionally, the least amount of funding from the state. That means that while CCV has the lowest tuition in the state, it has one of the highest tuitions of any community college IN THE COUNTRY.

This is problematic for our individual students, for their families, and for our state as a whole.

While Vermonters graduate from high school at very high rates, the rate of continuation to college is poor. I have to believe that one reason is because the cost of an education is formidable, even if you’re just trying to earn your associate’s degree.

I don’t have to tell you that an educated populace is the foundation for building a state where good-paying jobs are the norm or that an educated populace is the foundation for citizenship and democracy.

I want to bring a special focus on first-generation, low-income, and non-traditional students who make up a large proportion of CCV’s student body. Many students are both working and rearing children. Some are single parents. And because so many of the students are low-income, they face additional challenges related to meeting their needs for housing, childcare, physical and mental health, transportation, and childcare, and even school supplies.

These needs would be easily dealt with in a middle-class family with resources. However, for low-income students, these issues create barriers to learning and to completing their education.

For instance, in just the last six months, I have had students struggling with domestic violence, with significant mental health issues, housing issues, and with persistent physical health challenges, either their own or a family member’s. These are clear obstacles to learning and to completing one’s education.

In addition, even what middle-class families might consider only a very small challenge – such as a broken computer – presents serious obstacles to students with fewer resources. How long will it take to get the money to fix the computer? And how far behind will that student fall when she cannot keep up with course work? I have seen it take weeks and I have seen students fail classes because of such seemingly small obstacles.

Yes, the college has SOME loaner computers, but those are often spoken for at the beginning of the term. Yes, the college has computer labs, but transportation issues – compounded by the fact that the college is not open on weekends – create even more challenges.

So: That’s who comes through the door – wanting an education, wanting to change their lives, wanting to contribute to their communities. There are enough obstacles to achieving these educational goals. The high expense of tuition – and the debt that goes with that – should not be another barrier.

Some may ask: How can we afford this? My response is: How can we NOT afford this? The world is changing rapidly and if Vermont is to keep up, we need to educate our

citizens. I urge this committee to consider a more progressive approach to taxation to achieve these goals.

Last, I would like to add that restricting free tuition benefits only the students who are economically able to attend college full-time would provide this benefit only to the students who are least in need. Almost no CCV students are able to attend college full-time because of the multiple competing demands for their attention.

Thank you.