

My name is Deb Snell and I am the president of AFT/Vermont. We represent 4,000 higher education and health care professionals across the state. (Gives thanks to the CCV faculty who came to testify.)

I am here to speak with you tonight about the importance of increasing the funding of the Vermont State Colleges. I urge you to support Chancellor Spaulding's request for \$4million with an annual inflator as reflected in the bill put forth by Rep. Hill.

There was a time when the Vermont State Colleges were supported by the state. In 1980, state appropriations covered 51% of the costs of the VSC.

In 1961 the enabling legislation that created the VSC said the state would support it in "whole or substantial part".

Today less than 16% of the VSC revenue comes from the state while more than 84% comes from student tuition.

Vermont public colleges currently rank near the bottom in terms of state support for higher education,

The results are one of the highest tuitions in the country for public higher education, leaving Vermont families in economic crisis.

This means our students on average graduate with more student debt than students from other states, while our VSC employees earn less than employees in comparable institutions.

The Mission of the VSC states that the VSC is "For the benefit of Vermont, the Vermont State Colleges system provides affordable, high quality, student-centered, and accessible education, fully integrating professional, liberal,

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

57% of our students are first generation college students. The students at the VSC face a future of debt and struggle to stay in school, often at great sacrifice to themselves and their families.

Hunter, a Castleton student from Barre writes:

“The rising cost of tuition has greatly burdened my family. Both of my parents now work longer hours in order to pay for my college. My father works 7 days a week which means I barely get to see him when I’m home. My mother works 5 days a week and is also never around. My parents are making great sacrifices so I can get an education. However, I fear paying for it is running them into the ground.”

Here’s a few sentences from a Junior named Tucker, also attending Castleton:

“Coming from a single parent family I have experience the stress and hardships of watching my mom put two children through college. Currently, my mom is resorting to selling my childhood home because of the two tuitions.”

Dylan, another VSC student writes this:

“The dept I expect to accumulate is upwards of \$20,000 despite attending Castleton for only 2 years and coming form a low income family. I am a first generation college student, and my parents will be unable to assist me with paying off my debt. Because of this, my ability to contribute to our state’s economy will be severely hindered for several years after my graduation...”

Writes Tijana, a Johnson State College Student:

“What happened to the American dream? I thought that in America everyone should have a chance for education, for success, to make their lives and their children’s lives better. Everybody in this country deserves a chance.”

We need to end the cycle of saddling our students with a lifetime of debt. We, as a state, need to invest in our future. On behalf of our members and the students they serve, we are asking that you begin to fund the Vermont State Colleges as the enabling legislation intended. Please support Chancellor Spaulding’s request and H. 122 so that we can reclaim the promise of affordable higher education here in Vermont.

We have collected testimony and would like to present it to you as hard copies, as well as a flash drive.