



April 5, 2018

Senate Appropriations Committee
Senate Economic Development, Housing and General Affairs Committee

Dear Senators:

As the largest statewide business organization, the Vermont Chamber of Commerce represents about 1,500 members covering all industries and sectors from tourism to manufacturing, retail to health care and construction to technology. Our mission is to help grow the Vermont economy.

For the last two years, your committees have supported efforts to increase the number of workers in Vermont and upgrade the skill level of those available. In 2016, you appropriated \$250,000 to create a plan to encourage people to live, work and build their businesses here. That plan was published and in 2017 you appropriated another \$250,000 to begin executing it, which resulted in the ThinkVermont initiative. To build on this strong foundation, we encourage you to continue these efforts. As you begin your deliberations on the budget bill, we wanted to provide our support for the initiative to attract new workers to Vermont which will help address the worker shortages businesses face in almost every sector. The Vermont Futures Project estimates that our state will need 11,000 more workers annually to maintain the current level of economic growth. Last fall, the Vermont Chamber traveled around the state seeking input on how to address the workforce gap. In all communities there was an overwhelming recognition of this labor shortage and support for state-funded initiatives to help attract and retain workers.

Investments in identifying and attracting new workers, reducing the barriers to relocation, and converting visitors to residents are important efforts to keep our local economies vibrant. These investments will better assist employers in accessing and retaining qualified workers, as well as encouraging additional businesses to relocate here, knowing that they have a steady labor supply. Today, it is essential that we spend more time and resources identifying and attracting employees.

Vermont's iconic brand positions us well for attracting new Vermonters. Using contemporary tools to highlight the traditional characteristics that draw people to Vermont— such as access to outdoor recreation, safe communities, and exceptional local food and beverages— as well as our entrepreneurial environment, thriving tech industry, and robust manufacturing sector, we can begin to attract more people to move here.

Coupling this recruitment with resources about our vibrant communities and job prospects, personalized relocation services, and incentives to reduce the barriers to relocate, including how to assist the trailing spouse, will be very effective in addressing our demographic challenges. I am available to provide additional detail or testimony upon request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Betsy Bishop".

Betsy Bishop
President