

Good afternoon,

My name is Deb Snell. I am president of AFT-VT and a critical care nurse at the UVM Medical Center. Two weeks ago, I was hear testifying in favor of the \$15/hr minimum wage. There was an older gentleman there also testifying and his works truly stuck me. He announced that Franklin County was becoming a large exporter in Vermont, and the export he was referring to was talent.

I couldn't agree more. I have two sons, and the majority of their friends, if they went to college, went out of state. My youngest son goes to school out of state. Why? There is a school here that offers his major, but it cost \$5000/yr. My son is more fortunate that may others in this state. My husband and I were in a position to help out with tuition. We made a deal. We would pay for the first 2 years and he would pay for the second half. My current cost for his first two years is \$789 a month. I worry what is going to happen to him and others like him. I don't know where he will end up, but most likely not in Vermont.

I also see every day what is happening to his generation at my workplace. I work side by side with younger nurses, straight out of school that are working two sometimes three jobs to be able to pay their rent and student loans on top of the everyday expenses. There is a push to only hire Bachelors prepared nurses, which means they are walking away with even more debt. Everyday they wonder if they will ever be able to purchase a home in Vermont, because they will never be able to save for a down payment. They question their decision to work and live in Vermont, due to the cost of living.

For the past few months, we are averaging roughly 100 openings for nurses at the medical center, at one point we 100 traveling nurses covering these positions. We need to find a way to attract and retain not only nurses but other workers as well. We are going to be losing an entire generation of Vermonters to jobs out of state where the pay may be the same but the cost of living isn't. We have 3 institutions here that offer nursing programs, and many have wait lists. We lose a lot of those potential students to schools in NY, where even at out of state rates they are more affordable than our current tuition. We need to bring those future nurses home to Vermont.

We can't control the cost of real estate here, but we certainly have the ability to control the cost of education. Every Vermonter deserves the opportunity to attend college whatever income bracket they happen to fall under.

I have faith that someone born and raised in Vermont, educated in Vermont will stay in Vermont. We need to make this happen. We understand this is not going to happen overnight, but it is a goal we need to be working toward. It is a reality in many countries and now it's happening here in the United States. Let Vermont lead by example once again and show others states how young people can achieve their goals without the burden of student debt.

Deb

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