

FY21 Budget Testimony
February 10, 2020

Unfortunately, Vermont currently underfunds its public colleges and universities, resulting in inadequate resources for instruction and academic support, and it also means our public institutions rely too much on tuition dollars. Vermont has not always neglected higher education, but state support has consistently been reduced since 1980. In 1980, state appropriations covered 51% of the costs of the Vermont State College System (VSCS). Currently the state pays for less than 14% of our costs.

Currently, Vermonters who attend public institutions in-state pay one of the highest tuitions in the country and graduate with more debt. The VSCS primarily serves Vermont students. We would serve even more Vermonters if the state made tuition more affordable. Students who go to college in Vermont are more likely to stay in Vermont to live and work. In fact, 83% of the students in the VSCS are Vermonters, and 84% of our students stay and work in Vermont after graduation. Most importantly, 57% of our students are first generation college students. The ability for this population to attend college in their own state is vital. Governor Scott wants to keep younger Vermonters in the state as well as attract young working families to the state. Young families looking to move to Vermont are likely going to look at the availability of affordable quality higher education. Supporting the VSCS fits right in with the Governor's plan.

I urge the Legislature to support Chancellor Spaulding's proposal for a 5 million dollar increase each year for the next five years (25 million dollars total) to bring the VSCS up to the national average in terms of state appropriation. Another way to reduce Vermont students' debt burden is to work towards free tuition for all Vermonters at all VSCS colleges and universities.

An investment in public higher education is an investment in Vermont, since the majority of our students stay and work in Vermont after graduation. An investment in their education truly is an investment in the future well-being of our state. VSCS students become our teachers, nurses, small business owners, and more.

Thank you.

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