

Good afternoon, My name is Deb Snell. I'm an RN in the Medical Intensive Care unit at UVM Medical Center and President of AFT Vermont.

Our Union represents 5000 Vermonters, divided fairly evenly between Higher Education and Health Care. Vermont has continuously underfunded our public institutions of higher education for at least the last 40 years and as a result we continuously remain 48th or 49th in public support for higher education.

What are the consequences of this underfunding?

- Vermont students have some of the highest student loan debt in the country.
- Faculty and staff at the Community Colleges of Vermont, Castleton University, Northern Vermont University, Vermont Technical College and the University of Vermont, have some of the lowest wages in the country.
- We have one of the highest high school graduation rates in the country, but one of the lowest rates of students going on to college.
- Rutland County, Lamoille County, Orange County and Caledonia County have felt the negative impact as fewer students enroll in the Vermont State Colleges and more faculty and staff are laid off and when staff leave, these positions are not filled.

Another problem that is at the forefront of our members' lives is the nursing shortage. Because of the nursing shortage our members are facing moral and physical injury. Due to this shortage Vermont has to rely heavily on travel nurses, which raises the cost of healthcare for everyone.

We think the solution to both problems can be accomplished by

- Direct investment in our institutions of higher education. The Chancellor of the Vermont State Colleges has requested \$5 million in additional funds for the next 5 years to bring us in line with neighboring states.
- Direct investments in our students. New York has free instate tuition. UVM already provides free tuition for almost half of Vermonters who attend. We know it would be an incentive for families to move to Vermont, get educated in Vermont and stay in Vermont.
- A real solution to the nursing crisis. By directly investing in nursing faculty and nursing programs that could vastly increase the number of RNs who graduate each year.

Thank you for your time.