

Rebecca Buck

From: Kathleen Moore <kathleen1moore@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, February 26, 2019 8:11 PM
To: Theresa Utton; Rebecca Buck
Cc: Janet Ancel; Ann Cummings; Anthony Pollina; Andrew Perchlik
Subject: Budget input

Dear Legislators:

I am a faculty member at the Community College of Vermont. I am also a “faculty coach” for the TRIO Program, which is a federally funded program to support low-income and first-generation college students to succeed.

I am writing to tell you that I believe it’s imperative for Vermont to step up its higher education game. As you know, depending on how it’s measured, our state is either 49th or 50th in the entire country in per-capita higher education funding. Yes, I know: Vermont has a “high-tuition, high-aid” model – and no, that does not even come close to addressing the inequities built into the system as a result of the increasing gaps in funding since the 1980s.

Here are the facts on this alarming trend: The 1961 enabling legislation for the state college system called for support for the schools “in substantial part with state funds.” However, funding has declined from a high of nearly 50% to less than 20% today. That funding gap has severely impact students and faculty in our system:

- **Community College students in Vermont pay one of the HIGHEST tuitions in the country.** I know students who have left the state to find less expensive ways to educate themselves, including going to Canada and other U.S. states where the tuition is cheaper. They are weighing the expense of attending college in Vermont coupled with the relatively modest wage scales in our state...and sometimes the equation adds up to: “Go.” And the ones who cannot leave sometimes simply drop out. They cannot afford to continue. How can we build a thriving Vermont economy without an educated workforce?

Notably, Vermont has the *lowest* proportion in New England of high school students who attend college within two years. The National Center for Higher Education Management observes that just 54% of Vermonters go on to college after high school compared to the U.S. average of nearly 63%. In New York, nearly 70% go on to college, in Massachusetts, it’s almost 75%. I cannot help but believe that expense is a strong part of that dismal equation in Vermont.

- **The impact of underfunding on our Community College faculty is also profound.**

CCV is the only community college in the country where there are no full-time faculty and no departments. This is obviously not ideal for our students.

While our newly formed faculty union has made progress in increasing job stability for our more senior faculty, many of us are still largely “contingent” faculty who may not be offered courses or who may not work if the course doesn’t fill. We are hired contract-to-contract, and many of us – including me – serve on multiple separate contracts so that the **college does not have to pay benefits**. Many of us have been with the college for years and work close to full-time but in contrast to staff, **receive NO benefits: No**

healthcare, no sick time, no vacation, no holiday, and no retirement pay. Further, we are not paid between terms, although we do work (grading and building courses). This is quite literally exploitation. The state of Vermont should not attempt to balance the budget on the backs of faculty. Just like our students, we also deserve better.

The fiction sometimes offered to excuse this sorry situation is that because community college education is so important, all of us should be “giving back” to our communities. The reality is that many of our faculty members themselves are at or near poverty – in spite of very modest increases bargained for by our union. I will make the “modest proposal” that if community college education is so important, then everyone in the system – from the chancellor to the president of the college to the rest of the staff – should also be reduced to penurious wages in order to share the opportunity to be generous to our community.

Obviously, that is not the solution. Here’s what should be done, though: Our chancellor, Jeb Spaulding, would like to add \$5 million in additional funds over the next five years (\$25 million total), which would bring us up to the national average of 30% of the budget coming from state appropriations. That would allow the college to put the breaks on tuition increases and would allow wiggle room to pay faculty fairly.

I am also cautiously in support of the Free Tuition campaign in Vermont. I recognize that we are a state with limited resources, and I appreciate the dilemma of trying to stretch a dime to cover a dollar’s worth of needs. I am hopeful that we can seek creative funding in the form of progressive taxation and in the form of “sin” taxes (such as on marijuana). However – Whatever way we find to fund this increase in appropriations to the state college system, we should make it clear that it is vital that we **bring educational costs down for our students** in the Community College and that we **provide a reasonable living for our faculty members in that system, too.**

Thank you.

Kathleen Moore

Marshfield, Vermont