

Testimony in Support of 5.38, February 14, 2019

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Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of Bill 5.38 and the inclusion in it of the in-state students at the University of Vermont. The inadequate support from the state of Vermont of higher education has been a critical driver of the need to increase tuition such that it is unconscionably high in comparison to other states and in comparison to what Vermont families can reasonably be expected to pay. The University of Vermont is far from excluded from these issues. Only 6.2% of the very small Vermont appropriation goes toward the operating budget of UVM, far below what one would expect for a state university, while 53% is used to support our Vermont students, who make up 30.9% of our student body because without that support, our in-state students would face an even more unaffordable situation.

There seems to be a rumor floating around the statehouse, and probably around the state, that Vermont students already get free tuition at UVM and, therefore, do not need to be included in Bill 5.38 or any free-tuition bill. This is not the case. In fact, only 44% of Vermont students receive full tuition coverage and this figure includes the sizable number of us very lucky faculty and staff who receive free tuition for ourselves and/or our children. If we don't count those students, and instead count only those more typical and numerous Vermonters who apply to UVM for aid through normal processes, the percentage is reduced to 33%. That means that approximately 66% of in-state students graduate from UVM with an average debt of \$27,354. Vermonters receiving free tuition at UVM is the myth; indebtedness of nearly \$30,000 is the reality for our students.

These are the facts. I would like to close my testimony with my observations, having been a UVM faculty member for over 20 years. Unfortunately, UVM students have a reputation for doing a bit too much partying, and some of them do. However, in my everyday interactions with students, I am far more likely to encounter students who need to withdraw from or take time off from school because they can't afford the tuition and students who fall behind in their schoolwork or are unable to take part in internships, research projects, and service projects because they are working upwards of 20 hours per week to pay for their education, and that on top of the debt they will incur. This is not a defensible or a sustainable situation. It is for these students that I am testifying in support of free tuition to include Vermont students in all of our state institutions of higher learning.