

**Testimony – S.38**

**Friday, February 15, 2019**

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President VSCUP

I work at NVU-Lyndon, and have been working with at-risk students since I started there 14 years ago. My current role as Director of Advising Resources means that I am closely involved with helping students persist to a degree, and also in figuring out the reasons when they are not able to do so.

Many of our Vermont students come from modest means. It varies, but most years we have between 50-60% first-generation students, many of whom are also Vermonters from low-income backgrounds.

Overwhelmingly, we lose students because they cannot come up with the money to remain in school. For the Fall 2018 term at NVU-Lyndon alone, we had 42 students who were unable to register for Spring 2019 because they could not pay their Fall bill. On the surface, some of them did not persist for academic reasons – low number of credits earned or low GPA – but beneath that is often financial hardship. The faculty, staff, and administration at NVU-Lyndon try to support students who are working 30-40 hours a week to pay rent, buy gas and groceries, and cover expenses while attempting to be successful in their classes. But it is extremely hard to focus and excel when you can't afford your textbooks and aren't sure if you'll be able to afford dinner, much less your next term's tuition. Our students have promise and drive, but cannot overcome economic realities, and it seems like we lose more to financial hardship every year. These are not students whose families can simply take out a Parent Plus loan to cover any shortfalls.

Providing free tuition for our Vermont students would keep these students in our Colleges until graduation; it would mean more college graduates living and working in Vermont; it would mean increased opportunity for students who want to be teachers, healthcare professionals, small business owners, and productive members of their communities. We need to invest in our students, so they can invest in the future of our State.

Thank you.