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I won't repeat the facts you've heard before, I won't tell you a personal story to pull at your heart strings, I am here today to tell you about what funding higher education will bring. I am asking you to invest in the future of Vermont.

An investment in our students and our public institutions will make our state more prosperous and vibrant. College graduates make more and stimulate the economy. People who have a 4 year degree earn on average \$15,000 more a year or a \$1,000,000 more over their lifetime. In Vermont, 12.7% of the population is under 18 which is about 79,121 people. At the current rate of students continuing on past high school, that would mean that 31,648 would not go on to some form of post-secondary education; 31,648. Imagine if we could convince half of those students that college is a possibility by offering free tuition. We could tackle the nursing shortage happening statewide. We could fund the next generation of K-12 teachers. We could grow our green economy with new entrepreneurs. Free tuition would mean graduates would not have to leave the state because they can't afford both the high cost of living here and their student loan debt.

Over the years the Vermont Legislature has made a conscious decision to shift the burden of paying for public higher education from the state to students and their families. This is not a sustainable decision and we are seeing the impact of this decision on the precarious state of public colleges in the state, the lack of affordable options for our students, the low rate of high school graduates going on to college and the crushing debt faced by those who do go on to college. It is time we make a change for the benefit of our students and our state.

The students on this panel know that we will not benefit from this legislation. We're juniors and seniors, it is too late for us. But it is not too late for the next generation of Vermonters. We testify here today because we do not want to see them sentenced to living under the burden of debt we will.

Thank you for your time.