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Vermont Senate Testimony

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Hello, my name is Zella McMahon and I'm a freshman at Montpelier High School. I am here today in support of free in-state college tuition. College affordability is a huge issue for my generation, because we are living in a world where most well-paying jobs require a bachelor's degree which could mean starting off your career 100,000 dollars in debt.

We hear a lot about how young people are leaving Vermont for other states. We need to encourage my generation to stay in Vermont after high school and get their education, establish their careers, start families, and contribute to the economy and their communities. Having free in-state college tuition would be a huge incentive for high school graduates, like myself, to stay in Vermont for school, and our lives afterwards.

Some Vermont high school students know that they could never realistically afford college. Knowing that they would have the option of in-state college for free would motivate them to try harder in high school, so they would want better grades and would really try to graduate. In a survey we conducted at our school 38% of students said they would try harder if they knew they could go to state college, 19.6% said they wouldn't, and 42.4% said they might work harder.

Currently, Vermont ranks 50th for state support for public higher education. In Vermont, we have one of the highest high school graduation rates in the country. Despite this, 40% of our students don't go on to post-secondary education. This is in part because, with so little financial support from the state, Vermont students simply can't afford college.

Ever since I started high school last fall there's been lots of talk about preparing for college. I am fortunate enough to have a college savings account. I can afford college but for many of the students at my school, continuing their education after high school would be a real hardship. I want to live in a Vermont where secondary education can be easily accessible for all students, so I ask you to support free college tuition. Thank you for your time.