

My name is Kendra Ross and I am a student at Castleton University. I feel lucky not to have to deal with worries about paying for college now, but I am extremely worried about the future. I am currently in \$82,485 in debt just after three years of going to school. After the end of four years I will have be \$107,907 in debt. As a social work major, I probably will have to go back for my master's soon after graduation and this makes me nervous. I am at Castleton because of the social work program that they offered and because it is one of the best accredited programs I am happy with my decision, but I am afraid I will be paying off my debt for the rest of my life.

Social workers are individuals who want to change the world, but we don't get paid very much to do so. Having free tuition is an investment in people like me who want to live and work in Vermont to benefit the state. One of my professors was telling me about giving testimony at the budget hearings in Rutland. She was amazed at how many of the people testifying on behalf of others were her former students. They were there to represent elders for the Council on Aging, they worked for affordable housing for Rutland County, they were testifying for the need to support children. All of them were working for others. In the future, I want to be the one who will help make a difference, for Vermonters. Without more support for our students and our public colleges I fear we will lose our younger workforce and some amazing individuals who can make a great impact on Vermont.

Vermont is beautiful. Since coming here three years ago I knew that I wanted to stay, but I don't know if I will be able to stay. I don't think that I will be able to afford to stay will the debt that I will have accumulated. Many of my friends also want to stay. They just can't afford to stay because of their debt as well. They need to go where the money is and the wages in Vermont have been stagnant for years. I want to work for Vermont and to make it better than it already is, but with the amount of debt that I am in it is almost impossible. Something needs to change and free tuition is the change that needs to happen.