

**Statement to Vermont Senate Committee on Finance
Regarding S.126
By Michael Wood-Lewis, Burlington
April 9, 2019**

Hello. My name is Michael Wood-Lewis and I've lived in the South End of Burlington for more than 20 years with my wife and four kids. Thank you for the opportunity to address you today.

Some of you may know me as a founder, along with my wife Valerie, of Front Porch Forum. We launched FPF as a community-building business in 2006 and I worked 80-hour-weeks for many years for little to no pay, until the business was fully established. Now we employ 17 Vermonters and serve every town in the state, and 160,000 Vermonters read their local FPF daily.

Some of you may also have known our oldest child, Benjamin. Ben unexpectedly died just before his 16th birthday in 2015. He led a beautiful and full life, despite having severe cerebral palsy that necessitated 24-7 skilled support for him. Thankfully, between Vermont Medicaid and health insurance, many expenses associated with Ben's care were covered. (Although, I'd be remiss not to say that many Vermont families in similar situations face severe financial hardship due to insufficient State support and private insurance.)

All that said, during Ben's life and during the early years of our business, family finances were often stretched thin, but, at least, the Vermont tax code gave us a fair shake.

In 2018, this was not the case, when one of our other immediate family members had a major health crisis that ended up costing our family about \$150,000 out of pocket. Thankfully, we had the means to cover these costs that health insurance and other sources refused to pay. But this outlay made a serious dent in our college savings for three teens, let alone retirement.

As we struggled with this, we were shocked when the State changed tax law and charged us an additional \$7,000 in 2018 taxes. We couldn't write off our unexpected one-time \$150,000 medical expenses, as was possible for Vermonters in previous years. That's another \$7,000 out of our shrinking family savings.

I ask each of you to address this issue and fix the tax law so that it stops kicking Vermont families that have already been knocked down by major medical costs.

Thank you.