

# THE J. WARREN & LOIS MCCLURE FOUNDATION

*Promoting access to postsecondary and career education for Vermonters*

To: House & Senate Appropriations Committees  
From: Carolyn Weir, Executive Director  
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## **McClure Foundation Testimony on FY23 Higher Education Budget**

The McClure Foundation is a twenty-five-year affiliate of the Vermont Community Foundation that has spent the last thirteen years exclusively focused on workforce development and supporting college and career training systems in ways that promote equity and resilience.

On this date last year, we testified to the Senate Education Committee about the [impact and insights](#) generated by our promise to the Vermont high school class of 2020 of one free course of their choosing at the Community College of Vermont. The success of that initiative, as well as our related initiative promoting the short-term career training programs we consider “best bets” for landing a good Vermont job quickly, helped inspire pandemic-era public investment in college affordability.

We celebrate all the public and private investments in the affordability of college and career training during the pandemic – and all they have made possible for students. And we’ve spent much of the past year evaluating those investments and thinking about what they can teach us.

Key among those lessons is this: **in a high-tuition state like Vermont, where listed prices deter so many potential and aspiring students, sustaining the exciting new public perception of the affordability of college and career training will take more than scholarships. It will require institutional investments that lower tuition for everyone.**

With this in mind, we caution against a public policy approach that too narrowly focuses on direct aid without addressing Vermont’s status as the highest-tuition state. We encourage an approach that, alongside aid, drives down the cost of tuition for everyone at the institutions delivering the bulk of critical occupations credentials to low-income Vermonters.

**That’s why, in the Governor’s budget proposal, we celebrate the \$15 million allocated to lowering tuition for college-bound Vermonters at Vermont’s public institutions and to help these colleges attract future members of the workforce. It’s a strong start. But we fail to see the strategic objective driving the institutional allocation of that \$15 million: \$10 million to the University of Vermont and \$5 million to all the Vermont State College institutions combined (Castleton University, the Community College of Vermont, Northern Vermont University, and Vermont Technical College) especially relative to the percentage of Vermonters in attendance.**

If the state is willing to invest \$15 million in sustained funding directed at tuition reduction, it should clarify its strategic objective.

One possible and compelling objective is to improve the purchasing power of scholarships and aid for as many Vermont students as possible. We envision a future in which Vermont students can use

scholarships and aid to buy just as many courses and credits at Vermont's public colleges as students who live in nearly every other state. That vision hinges on public policy that supports reducing listed tuition prices to the national median.

**With this strategic objective as a driver, the allocation that we see as making the greatest difference for people in Vermont is \$10 million to the Community College of Vermont.** CCV serves the greatest number of Vermont students and the greatest number of low-income Vermonters, and it's the institution where about 60% of students benefiting from public scholarships and free tuition opportunities enrolled last fall.

**Importantly: \$10 million is the amount of sustained investment it would take to bring CCV's tuition in line with the national median.**

We encourage Committee members to champion this \$15 million as an important investment in workforce development and economic security for Vermonters – but we urge you to clarify the strategic objective for the investment and consider which institutional allocation best meets that objective.

A final note: this observation begs a larger question about the strategic objective(s) driving the \$100+ million in annual base funding to higher education writ large. The state's funding and allocation structure has not been sufficiently recalibrated in response to changes in impact (especially Vermont student FTE), underlying conditions, or strategic institutional or state priorities. Continued application of historic approach only cements our outlier status nationally.

Our recently released white paper on this topic, with data analysis from Public Assets Institute, overviews the conditions that have led to our current policy and funding framework for higher education and offers several possible paths forward. Read more at [mcclurevt.org/policy](https://mcclurevt.org/policy).