

I am Beth Walsh. I serve as the Director of Career Development at Northern Vermont University in Johnson, and as the President of the Vermont State Colleges United Professionals staff union. I am also a member of the VSC Labor Task Force, which is a group of VSC faculty and staff working on a solution to the financial challenges faced by the Vermont State Colleges.

The Labor Task Force proposal addresses restructuring to save resources and improve governance of the VSC, but today I want to focus on the need to reduce tuition.

- While we all know that the pool of traditionally college-bound Vermonters has shrunk, a review of the data shows that this change in demographics is not driving our decline in enrollment. In fact, it is our rise in tuition that is directly correlated with the enrollment decline.
- Vermont has one of the lowest percentages of High School graduates heading to college, and 51% of these college-bound students go to an out-of-state institution. This is the highest percentage in the country. The students who stay in Vermont graduate with a higher than average debt load. We have some of the highest tuition rates for a public education in the county. And we are the only state that allows our state grants to follow students across our borders without any restrictions.
- In the early 1960s the state committed to funding the VSC system in whole or in substantial part. Over the past 40+ years state appropriations have gone from about 51% of the VSC budget to about 17% currently. Each year our tuition goes up so that we can keep our doors open.

Please find a way to increase funding to the Vermont State Colleges so that we can continue to provide high-quality, accessible higher education for the betterment of Vermont. The Governor's one-time addition of \$20M for FY22 is needed, but not enough. Please do your best to find an additional \$17.4M to help us truly recover from decades of underfunding, the effects from the former Chancellor's recommendation to close 3 of our campuses, and the devastation of COVID-19.

Thank you

I hope that each of you have received our proposal *Uniting Vermont: A Design for a Unified Public-Access Higher Education System*. If you would like to receive it again, or have questions about this proposal, please don't hesitate to contact me. Beth.Walsh@NorthernVermont.edu.