

## Written Testimony of Chancellor of the Vermont State Colleges System to the House Education Committee, submitted February 11, 2022

Dear Committee Members:

Per your request at this afternoon's committee hearing, here is a summary of the VSC's feedback on the proposed language of **H.456**. The Vermont State Colleges System is supportive of this bill as it seeks to capture several of the recommendations made by the legislatively created Select Committee on the Future of Public Higher Education in Vermont. See [Select Committee's Final Report](#).

### Section One

- (a) Strategic Goals – No recommended changes. These generally align with the strategic goals set by the VSC Board of Trustees in Fall 2020. See <https://www.vsc.edu/board-of-trustees/strategic-planning/>.
- (b) Definitions – The VSC supports the revisions proposed by VSAC. The Committee noted the breadth of the definition of “relevant to Vermont’s needs” in the bill and asked how “relevance” could be measured. Quality and relevance of academic programs, along with affordability and accessibility, were included as strategic priorities by the VSC Board of Trustees. The Board has provided the following definitions and success metrics:

**“Quality and Relevance:** In the VSCS, relevance and quality of academic programs are understood in terms of student and state expectations of value both qualitatively and quantitatively. For students, expectations of value include the ability to pursue their chosen educational path, a positive “return on investment” in the cost of pursuing a particular program relative to expected earnings, successful preparation for external evaluations such as licensure exams, and preparation for lifelong career and personal success in our global 21<sup>st</sup> century. For Vermont, expectations of value include quality VSCS programs that are aligned with state workforce needs and that are offered in a fiscally responsible manner, delivered in ways relevant to today’s students’ and employers’ needs.

Success on quality will be measured by:

1. The ability of VSCS graduates to meet externally-recognized measures of achievement (i.e. licensure exam success rates) and their preparation to compete in the global workforce; and
2. Consistency of high-quality education and instruction provided by the VSCS across the system; and
3. External recognition (including accreditation) of the quality of VSCS programs.

Success on relevance will be measured by:

1. Development of degree paths that are highly relevant to student goals and expectations of value in a career;
2. Offering programs and credentials that meet Vermont's workforce needs; and
3. Delivering programs and credentials flexibly in a modality that meets student needs and expectations.

It is essential that the Board retain the necessary flexibility on how to measure progress on its strategic priorities moving forward as these may evolve over time and so the VSC would recommend that the current definition of relevance in the bill remain unchanged.

The Committee also asked about other benchmarks and reporting requirements for the Vermont State Colleges. Act 74 of 2021 contained several annual reporting requirements for the Vermont State Colleges to be shared with the House and Senate Committees on Appropriations, Educations, Commerce, and Institutions. See [Act 74 of 2021](#) at Section E.602.2.<sup>1</sup>

### Section Two – VSAC Reporting

The VSC supports the revisions proposed by VSAC.

### Section Three – Report

The VSC strongly supports the Select Committee's recommendation that Vermont explore how to implement a requirement that all high school students complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid ("FAFSA") as a condition of graduation. This concept is being actively explored elsewhere across the United States, including Florida, Hawaii, Indiana, Nebraska, New York, and South Carolina. In those states that have already adopted such an approach, my understanding is that the data supports a finding that completion of the FAFSA does correlate with a higher percentage of high school students progressing on to post-secondary education. However, one concern is whether such a requirement could disproportionately adversely impact those students who are already facing substantial obstacles to pursuing a post-secondary education, such as first generation, Pell-eligible, and students who manage disabilities. Appropriate supports

---

<sup>1</sup> Act 74 also identified relevance as a strategic priority for the Vermont State Colleges and defined relevance as follows:

"(3) Relevance.

(A) Ensure that each VSC student is prepared for a lifelong career and personal success in the globally-competitive 21st century.

(B) Ensure that VSC offers educational programs that are:

(i) aligned with State workforce needs;

(ii) offered in a fiscally responsible manner; and

(iii) delivered in a manner that is relevant to current student and employer needs."

[Act 74 of 2021](#) at Section E.602.2(a)

would need to be put in place to ensure that such a requirement would not inadvertently result in fewer students graduating from high school.

Section Four – Disposal of Property

The VSC recommends that this section be deleted in its entirety as this provision has already been enacted into statute at 16 V.S.A. § 2188 as part of Act 74 of 2021. See <https://legislature.vermont.gov/statutes/section/16/072/02188>.

Sections Five, Six and Seven

The VSC has no recommended changes to these sections.

Finally, after further reflection and consideration, the VSC does not have any additional testimony to provide on **H.377** (Advance VT) other than to express its support of the bill.

In conclusion, thank you for the opportunity to testify about **H.456** and to provide this written testimony.

Respectfully submitted,



Sophie Zdatny  
Chancellor, Vermont State Colleges System