

February 16, 2022

Nicole C. Twohig, UVM Staff United Representative

Testimony to Senate Ed Committee on S. 248

Hello. I am Nicole Twohig. I use she/her pronouns and am part of the clerical/technical unit of UVM Staff United, represented by AFT-Vermont. As a member of UVM Staff United's bargaining team, I am here today to represent my 1,350 staff colleagues. I've been working in the psychiatry department at the University of Vermont since April 2020 as a communications and program specialist at the Vermont Center on Behavior and Health where we focus on personal behavior patterns and the risk for chronic disease and premature death. We are known nationally for our work on addiction and research in reducing combustible cigarette smoking. I previously worked at UVM from 1999 to 2002 in the medical development office as a prospect researcher when I first moved to Vermont. I am here today to ask you to support S. 248.

For far too long we have witnessed the voices of those doing the actual day-to-day work at the University of Vermont (UVM) ignored in all decision-making processes. The lack of staff and faculty participation in the current governance structure has allowed an information void to fester allowing those in power to make both short- and long-term judgments on how to spend UVM's annual dollars, including state and federal taxpayer (i.e., federal grants) money, with virtually no accountability to the people that ensure UVM remains a functioning, positive, and inclusive educational institution. In short, UVM's leadership is failing all of us.

While we understand that any UVM Board of Trustees member we elect will not vote on union matters, including wages, benefits and working conditions, we think it is useful to have a representative who knows the following. Some UVM staff are forced to work two and even three jobs to make ends meet because UVM does not pay livable wages. A staff food pantry was launched and due to such high demand, it ran out of food almost immediately. This alone speaks to the ongoing problem of trying to live in Vermont, particularly Chittenden County, on UVM staff wages. In addition, due to an ongoing hiring freeze, many staff are working more than one position but being paid at the lower wage position. This is not only an imbalance in workload, but simply unjust.

We witness racial injustice occurring regularly throughout UVM, most recently in the bypassing of a competitive hiring process for higher level administrative positions in favor of internal promotion, which excludes the possibility of hiring well qualified BIPOC candidates and expanding diversity across UVM. We are unable to meet our commitment to affirmative recruitment and hiring especially in the sciences because of the low staff wages offered by UVM even though part of our current strategic vision includes elevating UVM from a R2 to a R1 research institution. Research faculty are frustrated by this as they seek to expand the diverse voices, perspectives, and ideas that contribute to their research and become more competitive in their federal grant applications.

Voices of staff have been discounted and silenced for as long as I can recall. Wages, career mobility, and diversity have been problems at UVM since I first worked at this institution in

1999. It is what forced me to leave in 2002 and I was shocked to see that nothing had changed, perhaps only become worse, in the nearly 20 years since I left. An institution of higher education can only be as strong as the sum of all its parts. If we elevate, listen, and value all the voices that create the UVM community, then we can create a shared governance structure that will truly ensure UVM is successful for decades to come.

On behalf of UVM Staff United, we hope you will support S.248 and pass it out of committee.