

Dr. Linda Olson  
Sociology and Women's and Gender Studies Professor at Castleton University  
Vice President of Higher Education for American Federation of Teachers Vermont

Thank you for the opportunity to speak about my support for S. 248 and I realize you have a full roster of administrators who are speaking after me, so I will be brief.

As a faculty member in the VSC, I am speaking primarily about that institution. I would like to begin by responding to Dr. Alan Ray's expert testimony given earlier this week. I will focus on these issues because I suspect they are the same issues that will be addressed by the administrators testifying today.

Dr. Ray's focus seemed to be on three central areas: that faculty and staff are not "honest brokers" in the work of the board, that they have conflicts of interest that would impede their ability to do the work of the board, and he took issue with how S. 248 would select faculty and staff representation:

1. Dr. Ray said that faculty need to "keep in their lane" and that they do not have the fiduciary expertise required to be board members.
  - a. The work of the board is broad. There are committees that work on issues from student life to finances and facilities to diversity, equity, and inclusion to curriculum approval.
  - b. The fiduciary health of the institutions requires that all aspects of campus life work together. The work of colleges is the work of the faculty, staff, and students. Having a seat at the table as a voting member of the board would

ensure that decisions were made based on all available information, including the day-to-day operations.

2. Dr. Ray also claimed that faculty and staff on the board might be beholden to those that put them there.
  - a. Faculty and staff serve on other boards. Maybe at the local library, a non-profit organization, or credit union. To say that we would not be able to serve without a conflict of interest is to infantilize us as professionals.
  - b. According to AAUP data that I shared with this committee the last time I spoke, 26% of public colleges and universities have faculty and staff representation. What we are asking is a growing trend; it is neither rare or unusual and it costs nothing but would mean so much in the decision-making process. This sentiment was echoed by faculty and board member Abby Cohn from Cornell University when she testified: “Once we are elected, we are first and foremost members of the board, just like other board members whether appointed or elected. We function as full voting members of the board with the fiduciary responsibility to represent **the best interests of Cornell as an institution**”.
  - c. Couldn't same argument of conflicts of interest be made about other board members? Those appointed by the governor or board for example.
  - d. If you have no faculty and staff representation on the board, you create an administrative echo chamber. This means the board is only hearing from those who tend not to be involved in the student facing, day-to-day work of campus life. This also means that issues that should be explored, such as administrative

bloat (which IPEDS data cites as a problem), which is a problem at the VSC and UVM goes unaddressed.

3. Dr. Ray discussed his concern about unions selecting representation on the board. I think both the VSC and UVM are willing to discuss alternative ways this selection could take place and we also are willing to discuss the numbers of representatives.

I want to conclude by making it clear to this body that road of this transformation process for the VSC has been lengthy. It started long before that terrible decision in April of 2020 to close three residential campuses. Over the almost three decades I have been at Castleton, we have existed in an almost constant state of precarity. In recent years we had layoffs at VTC in 2014, we had layoffs at CU in 2018, and we attempted to consolidate NVU. Before we the paint was even dry on that consolidate effort; we were closing the campuses. We lost good people during this time, who feared the future of their positions, so they left. NVU Johnson for example has half of the full-time faculty than it did in 2014. This has been especially hard for the staff. Campuses have survived by increasing the workload of those who remain. At CU for example, the custodian for the building I work in is now expected to clean three buildings instead of just one. Our administrative assistant in the same building is doing the work that used to be done by three full-time staff members. We are all tired, demoralized, and frustrated. We see a lack of transparency about what this “transformation” will mean to our futures, our campuses, our communities, and most importantly, our students. Giving us a seat at the table will help morale most definitely, but we are asking for this because we want to make this transition truly transformative. We want to play a role in creating a system that not only is sustainable but

thrives in the future. Without our voices and expertise at the table, we fear we will be in the same position in five years that we were in April of 2020.