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Subject: Testimony for S.248

I am sending my testimony from Friday afternoon to the members of the Education Committee. Thank you for taking the time for me to testify.

Rep. Lynn Dickinson

Senate Education 3.18.22

Testimony S. 248

Rep. Lynn Dickinson, Chair VSCS Board of Trustees

Overview:

The Vermont State Colleges System provides an essential higher education gateway for Vermonters and the state of Vermont. Created by statute and embracing a rich tradition of serving Vermonters, the work of our colleges and universities touches diverse aspects of Vermont life. The education and services provided by the Vermont State Colleges System contribute to the success of residents, our communities, and the Vermont economy.

Our trustees are the leadership team that chart the course of the future of the system. They share in the decisions that shape how the system addresses the needs of our current students and constituencies and how the VSCS will evolve to meet the needs of the future. They also work to address many challenges faced by contemporary higher education. Together, the Board navigates issues of institutional financial sustainability, prioritizing the accessibility, affordability, quality, and relevance of our students' endeavors. *For the benefit of Vermont*, as our mission statement begins, we remain steadfast in our commitment to providing access to high-quality, affordable post-secondary education in all corners of the state.

The Board of Trustees of the Vermont State Colleges System is the fiduciary of the system and is charged with the oversight of the corporation. As the governing board of the system, the Board is the final authority and is held accountable for both the system and the institutions within it. The Board provides leadership and governance at the

system level, and system policies govern fiscal, academic, student, and personnel matters.

Board Principles of Governance:

There are certain clear and accepted principles that govern the Board's conduct of VSCS affairs and its relationships. These include the following:

- Board Members are officers of the system with a fiduciary responsibility for the entire system. They represent statewide, rather than regional, political, or personal interests.
- The Board limits its direct action to the development and oversight of policy and finances, and to the hiring and evaluation of its executive officers. The Board does not directly manage the institutions.
- The Board takes action as a board, not as 15 individual trustees. Board members express their views and seek changes within the committees and other structures of the Board, rather than outside the Board process.
- Openness, trust, and honesty are the trademarks of all dealings between Board members, with the officers of the institutions, and with the public.

Board Responsibilities:

Annually, the Board of Trustees has the following responsibilities:

- Selection of external auditor and review of audit reports
- Approval and audit of internal operating and capital budgets
- Establish tuition rates and fees
- Develop request for state appropriations
- Review of existing academic programs under VSCS Policy 101
- Review of program enrollment under VSCS Policy 109
- Election of Board officers (Chair, Vice-Chair, Secretary, and Treasurer)
- Attend VSCS Board of Trustees retreat
- Performance review and reappointment of Chancellor and institution presidents
- Attend Institutional Commencements

Ongoing Tasks of the Board include:

- System-wide strategic planning
- Policy development, review, and revision
- Review of system performance indicators and benchmarks
- Review of and action on financial and real estate transactions
- Review of and action on new program proposals under VSCS Policy 102
- Participation in legislative activities

Board Composition:

Our Board composition is governed by statute and is a body of fifteen people. Five trustees are appointed by the Governor, four trustees are elected by the Board, and four trustees are state legislators who are elected by the General Assembly. There is also one student trustee elected by the VSC student Government Association. Trustees serve a four-year term, with the exception of the student trustee, who serves a one-year term but may be reelected to a second term. The Governor is an ex-officio Board member.

Our current Board is incredibly dynamic, filled with Vermonters who bring a fair and thoughtful approach to their leadership. We have former K-12 educators, economic development professionals, higher education professionals, health care professionals, business owners, people embedded in Vermont's workforce development initiatives, and more. The board represents a diversity of ages, experience, community involvement, and the vibrancy of Vermont's communities, with representation from nearly every corner of Vermont.