

Good afternoon and thank you for the opportunity to testify.

My name is Leona Watt, I am the Chair of the VSEA 's Legislative Committee. I work as a supervisor in the Department of Corrections in the Brattleboro Probation and Parole Office. I have worked for the State of Vermont for nearly 22 years.

I am testifying in support of S.96 which is VSEA's number 1 legislative priority this session. Our members are concerned about their own job security, as taxpayers they want to ensure that workers are not exploited by contracting with private entities that save money in their name by paying lower wages with inferior benefits. We should not be trying to save money on the backs of workers, neither for state employees nor entities they contract with.

As a long-term employee of the DOC, I am particularly concerned about our use of private prisons and our contract with Core Civic. This legislation would not prohibit such a contract, but it would set some standards that protects the workers at that facility by insuring they are compensated in a comparable manner as our employees would be in Vermont, and that they have certain employment protections, like whistleblowing protections that are critical in a correctional facility. This law would also ensure that there is accountability for one of the most profitable corporations in our nation, it would ensure that this is a good deal financially for Vermont taxpayers and that Core Civic lives up to state and federal regulations and laws, especially as they pertain to nondiscrimination and workplace safety.

Thank you.