

Dear Chair Bongartz and Senate Education Committee Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to present to Senate Education about the Vermont State Colleges Systems (VSCS). We wanted to take a moment to follow up regarding our FY26 budget request.

As we discussed in your committee, the VSCS plays a critical role in advancing education and opportunity in Vermont, serving over 10,000 students across the state. Our institutions are deeply embedded in Vermont's communities, with 84% of our students calling Vermont home—learning, working, and ultimately contributing to the vitality of our state.

And as we showed in detail in our presentation, our commitment to educational quality and fiscal responsibility remains strong. Since FY20, we have reduced personnel spending by \$11,000,000 and streamlined operations, lowering personnel costs from 63% to 57% of total spending. These efforts reflect our dedication to efficiency while continuing to provide students with high-quality academic programs and support services.

Each year, VSCS graduates thousands of students prepared to contribute to Vermont's economy and communities. In 2023-2024, nearly 2,000 students earned certificates, associate, bachelor's, and master's degrees, with many entering essential fields such as education, healthcare, technology, and business. Our programs are designed to align with Vermont's workforce needs, ensuring that students are prepared not only with strong academic foundations but also with the skills and experiences necessary to thrive in their careers.

State investment in VSCS has been transformative, allowing us to strengthen our programs and expand educational opportunities for Vermonters. We could not have done this work without the partnership of the Legislature. Since FY2020, state appropriations have increased from 17% to 26% of our revenue—bringing Vermont more in line with its regional peers. This growing partnership has helped us maintain affordability and sustainability while meeting the needs of students and employers across the state.

For FY2026, we respectfully request your support for the following:

- **General Fund Base Request: \$53,968,692**
 - Includes:
 - **3% inflationary adjustment: \$1,528,214**
 - **Structural deficit reduction as supported in Act 113 of 2024, Sec. E.602.2(b)(1): \$1,500,000**
 - Note the Governor recommendation of \$52,468,692 **excludes** the \$1,500,000 increase related to Act 113.
- **One-Time Bridge Funding: \$5,000,000**
 - Governor recommended
- **Allied Health: \$297,087** (Supports Allied Health education programs at Vermont State University)

- Governor recommended
- **CCV Tuition Advantage Program: \$1,000,000**
- Governor recommended

Additionally, we strongly encourage your support for Vermont Student Assistance Corporation's (VSAC) proposed Freedom & Unity scholarship program. With the conclusion of the Critical Occupations scholarship program and the expiration of federal COVID relief grants, Vermont students are facing a significant gap in financial support for higher education. These federal grants played a critical role in stabilizing enrollment during and after the pandemic, and their conclusion presents a real risk to college access and affordability. The Freedom & Unity scholarship would help fill this crucial void, ensuring that Vermonters can continue to access the education they need to enter our state's workforce. This scholarship program would work in tandem with our institutional efforts to keep higher education accessible and affordable for Vermont students, mitigating the potential enrollment declines that could result from the loss of pandemic-era financial support.

- VSAC – Freedom and Unity Grant \$5,200,000


Looking ahead, VSCS remains focused on expanding educational access and fostering innovation to meet Vermont's evolving needs. Our vision is centered on meeting students where they are—whether they are high school graduates, working adults, or career changers seeking new opportunities. With campuses and learning centers strategically located across Vermont, we are uniquely positioned to serve learners in every region.

The House Appropriations Committee has not yet made any final budget decisions about VSCS appropriations. We will follow up when the House budget has passed.

Your support for this budget request will enable us to continue providing high-quality, accessible education to Vermonters while strengthening the state's workforce and economic future. We appreciate your consideration and welcome the opportunity to provide any additional information you may need.

We would be happy to provide any additional information needed.

Respectfully submitted,



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Chancellor, Vermont State Colleges System