

Testimony in Support of S.38, February 15, 2019

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Thank you for giving me a moment today to speak in support of S.38 and particularly to recommend the inclusion of the University of Vermont in the bill as one of the eligible postsecondary institutions which Vermont students might attend and receive tuition-free scholarships.

UVM is in danger of becoming the University IN Vermont rather than the University OF Vermont. What I mean is that UVM ought to be made accountable to the public, rather than becoming an increasingly privatized university that is led by outside interests and entirely dependent on out of state tuition. As Vermont's flagship research university, UVM should be accessible to Vermont students who wish to pursue higher education without going into crippling debt. This is often not the case.

If UVM were free and accessible to Vermont students, the university might better reflect the values and the people of our state. We are not serving Vermont students when access to UVM comes with a hefty debt-load. UVM tuition is unfeasible for all but wealthy families and those who are willing and able to go into extreme debt. This situation clearly doesn't serve the Vermonters that a land-grant institution is supposed to support. We ought to be making paths to higher education available to Vermont's working classes. Instead, UVM courts wealthy international and out-of-state students for tuition dollars.

Including UVM in this tuition-free scholarship bill might represent a step toward holding the university accountable to public interests and values as well as its land-grant mission. UVM's many resources and opportunities should be available to Vermonters. I fear that if this free tuition bill doesn't include UVM that the university will become increasingly inaccessible to Vermont students.