

March 25, 2026

Dear Members of the Board of Trustees and Vermont State Colleges System Leadership,

Since the merger of our beloved state college campuses—Castleton, Johnson, Lyndon, Randolph, and Williston—many positive developments have taken place at Vermont State University. As with any significant structural change, the transition has also brought challenges, learning opportunities, and periods of adjustment. Across our campuses, faculty and staff have approached these changes with grace, grit, and a resilient commitment to serving Vermont students.

However, there is one trajectory that warrants careful review before it gains further momentum. The Vermont Legislature mandated that significant cuts to spending were required as part of the transformation of the Vermont State Colleges into VTSU. This narrative has been consistently presented to stakeholders and to the public as critical to our very existence. While it is true that restructuring and responsible financial management are necessary in the current higher education environment, the data show that student-facing positions (full-time bargaining-unit staff and faculty) and our physical campuses have borne the brunt of the cuts, while the number and compensation of upper-level management positions has grown.

Student-facing positions are the backbone of the student experience. They are the advisors, faculty members, and support staff who help students enroll, persist, and graduate; this is the fundamental recruitment and retention that will allow our system to thrive. However, campuses have experienced hiring freezes and hiring “chills,” attrition through retirement and resignation has been encouraged, and previous full-time frontline positions have been filled with interim employees. Meanwhile, the number of non-bargaining-unit managerial positions has continued to grow, and their compensation increased.

Staffing Trends

Personnel (census) data comparing 2019 with 2025 show that across the system, over the course of the “transformation”:

- Bargaining-unit full-time staff positions **decreased by 26%**, representing **115 lost positions**.
- Bargaining-unit full-time faculty positions **decreased by 30%**, representing **72 lost positions**.
- Non-bargaining-unit full-time upper-level administrative positions **increased by 41%**, adding **38 positions**.

Higher education research often suggests a general benchmark of approximately **three faculty members for every one managerial administrator** (a 3:1 ratio). Currently, our system has **180 full-time faculty and 131 administrators**, resulting in a ratio closer to **1.3:1**, a structure that raises questions about long-term sustainability and alignment with institutional priorities.

This is an interesting talking point, as VTSU decision-makers have made cuts to academic programming based on student to faculty ratios. Where is the equitable analysis of other disproportionate ratios in the system that could be optimized along with student-facing positions?

Budget Implications

In terms of actual dollars, cuts to full-time faculty and staff and increases in full-time managerial administration are amplified by the fact that inflation increased by approximately 3.5% per year between 2019 and 2025. To fully appreciate these changes to expenditure, 2019 values have been adjusted to account for inflation.

Personnel data show that between 2019 and 2025:

- Bargaining unit full-time faculty salary spending **decreased by 30%** (a reduction of approximately \$5,388,000 in 2025 dollars)
- Bargaining unit full-time staff salary spending **decreased by 21%** (a reduction of approximately \$5,165,000 in 2025 dollars)
- Non-bargaining-unit administrative salary spending **increased by 15%** (an increase of approximately \$1,604,000 in 2025 dollars)

Cost-cutting measures have disproportionately negatively impacted faculty and staff, while administrative expenditures continue to rise.

Impact on Students and Campus Experience

The reduction of faculty and staff has already had tangible impacts:

- Fewer academic program offerings
- Reduced on-campus supports for student success and degree completion
- Deferred maintenance and deterioration of campus facilities
- Strained campus services and student life programming

These conditions do not strengthen enrollment or attract new students. In fact, they risk weakening the very experiences that make our campuses vibrant and appealing to prospective Vermonters.

Commitment of Faculty and Staff

Throughout these changes, faculty and staff have remained committed to the institution's success. Many have actively supported the system at the State House, advocating for increased legislative funding and public investment in Vermont's public higher education system.

Sustaining the mission of serving Vermont students requires continued investment in the people who support them every day.

At a time when institutions across the country are recognizing the importance of workforce stability, the current trajectory risks undermining the strength of the very workforce that enables student success.

Additional Concerns

There are additional examples that raise questions about spending priorities:

- Some non-bargaining-unit administration annual salary increases have equaled or exceeded the *full* annual salary of some frontline staff positions.
- From 2024 to 2025, the five highest-paid positions within the system collectively received **\$129,188.34 in annual raises**, with some increases exceeding **20%**, or more than **\$35,000**.
- The 2025 annual three-day Board of Trustees retreat at the **Woodstock Inn & Resort** cost more than **\$31,000**, not including travel and lodging expenses for remote administrative employees hired from outside the state.
- Institutional culture worth noting; bargaining unit members fought for 8 months or longer to receive 12-15% raises to be spread out over 3-4 years in the most recent rounds of contract negotiations. The message sent by the above actions, to staff and faculty, is that their investment, commitment and dedication are not valued.

These expenditures stand in contrast to ongoing hiring freezes and staffing reductions affecting student-facing roles, as well as other cost-cutting measures such as mandating that academic departments reduce their expenditures by required percentages year after year.

A Call for Alignment and Accountability

A mission statement holds meaning only when an institution's internal actions align with the values it proclaims.

We are calling for greater transparency, accountability, and balance in decision-making around staffing and spending. Responsible stewardship of tax dollars should apply to *all* areas of the institution.

Labor Task Force Asks:

- The Chancellor recently asked the Board of Trustees to support her request for spending to hire more upper administrative positions, the Board approved.
 - Please explain how this decision will save money for the overall system's budget.
- Across the system, we struggle to retain current employees and we struggle to hire new employees due to low salary price points. Yet, upper management continues to increase salaries for new non-bargaining unit positions, "because people can make more money elsewhere." The same sentiment rings true for front-line staff.
- What is the Chancellor's Innovation Fund? How
much is this fund at this time and what is it held for?
- Please provide a detailed rationale for non-bargaining unit raises.
 - Who approves NBU annual raises?

- How can VSC decision-makers approve an annual raise that is greater than some staff's annual income?
- We would like a written explanation from the Board of Trustees to address the following:
 - Upper management stated that the annual Board of Trustees Retreat was held at The Woodstock Inn due to its central location and ability to support the technical needs of the retreat.
 - Please explain why this retreat could not be held on one of our campuses, as our campuses have the technology to teach Face-to-Face plus online courses. We have the technical infrastructure and support. One campus is located in the exact center of the state, with access to I-89 and a hotel within 1 mile from the campus for lodging needs.
 - As representatives of the community of staff and faculty, in line with our long demonstrated commitment to the VSC system and higher education for Vermonters, we ask that the President, the Chancellor, and the Board of Trustees make positive change by supporting the addition of a voting staff and faculty member on the Board.

The future of affordable higher education for Vermont students depends on a system that invests not only in strategy and leadership, but also in the faculty and staff who bring the institution's mission to life every day.

We urge the Board and system leadership to carefully review the trajectory of administrative growth and to ensure that future decisions reflect an equitable and sustainable investment in the people and programs that define our campuses.

Respectfully,

The Labor Task Force

Sebastion Lury, AFT VSCUP/PAT Co-President

Billie Neathawk, VSEA Staff Federation Unit Chair

Chris Reilly, AFT VSC Faculty Federation President

Ashley Stackowitz, AFT SUP/PAT Co-President

Cc: David Bergh, VTSU President

Dr. Sherry Kollmann, VTSU In-coming President