



STATE OF VERMONT
GENERAL ASSEMBLY
STATE HOUSE

**Statement of Senate President Tim Ashe and Speaker of the House Mitzi Johnson
Re: Pending Proposal to Close Three State College Campuses**

“Put simply, the Board of Trustees of the Vermont State College System should not vote tomorrow on any sweeping proposals to the configuration of the VSCS system.

The State College system faces unquestionable challenges. The COVID-19 financial impacts are real, as is the uncertainty the pandemic has created in terms of the upcoming academic year. In addition, enrollment and financial challenges pre-exist the pandemic. Those structural issues are the true long term threats to the Vermont State Colleges and other higher education institutions in Vermont.

While we recognize that change must come, an abrupt vote to close three campuses, with three days notice, without a public plan for what comes next for the students, faculty and staff, and the host communities is not appropriate, especially in this era of unprecedented unknowns. Geographic and financial access to higher education is critical to creating opportunities for all Vermonters and for our rural communities. We recognize the dedicated work of the faculty, staff, and board to plan for the future of the State Colleges, but we need to ensure it fits into a strategic and integrated plan for all public higher education in Vermont.

We ask the Board to postpone its action, and to announce that postponement today to the public.

The Vermont State College System and the State of Vermont are partners in meeting the post-secondary educational needs of Vermonters and students from beyond our state’s borders. In that spirit, we believe a postponement of the pending vote will allow the following:

- * An economic analysis of the impact of closure on the three host communities
- * The development of a potential one-year bridge budget that keeps the three campuses operational for the 2020-2021 academic year while decisions about the future of these campuses are more thoughtfully crafted considering both VSCS and State of Vermont needs
- * The establishment of a multi-institution workgroup to consider options for beyond the 2020-2021 academic year.

In addition, a postponement of the vote will show respect to the students, faculty and staff whose lives will be most impacted by any changes.