

Student Assistance Professionals of Vermont

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Good morning; my name is Debby Haskins and I am the Executive Director of the Association of Student Assistance Professionals (S.A.P's) of Vermont; I am the current Executive Director have worked as a SAP for 10 years in two central VT schools, before becoming the President. I represent the 86 counselors who work in 92 schools throughout VT. These are highly skilled substance abuse counselors providing prevention and intervention/referral/screening services to nearly ½ of the students in VT schools. I would like to thank you for this opportunity to be here today. I am always honored to walk into the Capitol and know that my grandfather was here before me as a Legislator in 1915; and his father before him in 1906 representing Isle LaMotte.

But first just a little background about me: I live in North Calais, am a native Vermonter; and when I say this I don't just meant that I am born here, but that I am Native American; my great grandmother was an Abenaki and lived in Isle Lamotte. I tell you this because my father was unable to receive his education past 8th grade, working in the quarries and not having the opportunity to attend high school off the "island". I am a first generation college graduate in my family. As you will see by my testimony graduating from high school and college makes me a key contributor to VT's income.

I have had the brief opportunity to share my perspective in two other committees; in particular about the human costs to losing such a valuable 20 year comprehensive program that serves 40,000 youth at a cost of \$38.63 per student/per year. (which provides a school with a "SAP" for 2 days per week; this counselor is available to families, faculty and students). I'd like to start with several statistics that I shared to a previous committee (handout 1) and then how we "Shovel up" these costs and would refer you to the first document, the 2009 CASA Report; specific to VT. Of special note is that 18.4% of our state budget is spent on the burden to us, and only 1 ¢ to prevention. Eliminating the SAP's will destroy prevention/intervention and referral services in VT as we know it.

Here are 5 key economic issues directly impacted by this SAP elimination.

1. **Jobs/Unemployment/Lost Revenue/Increased Cost to our social system:** Today I'd like to talk about the costs associated with the elimination of all 88 positions. The obvious is that all 88 will be unemployed as of July 1st unless funds are restored. Our budget was \$1.6 million; which goes directly to ADAP; and I write a grant for the oversight and quality control of the program. The trickle down affect has already begun, with 3 counselors leaving their positions and taking jobs elsewhere, 2 have taken jobs out of state. If each counselor goes on "the dole" for unemployment/food stamps, insurance or other services VT will be paying a hefty bill. One estimate by the Department of Unemployment was \$352,000 (88 x\$4,000). So obviously the loss of so many jobs; both instate and out of state is of vital importance to our economy.
2. **Drop outs/Cost of Incarceration:** Equally important is what will happen to the youth we serve. I'm sure you know that there are 80,127 students grades 1-12; we are accessible to 1/2 of

all students. According to the Department of Education there were 7,380 seniors as of October 2009; they report a drop out rate of 3% which is equivalent to 221 youth dropping out. Cohen (1998) Estimates the cost savings from helping just one high-risk youth graduate from high school, avoid heavy drug use, and not engage in crime would range between \$1.7 and \$2.3 million dollars. When a student drops out they make \$9,634 less than the high school graduate. (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2007). We all know the cost of incarceration; the Department of Correction figures are \$25,000 for out of state costs and \$55,000 for in-state costs. In 2009 DOC reports 6,821 people of all ages who were on probation at a cost of ??? The SAP's role is to intervene early and often; as Tim Ix, Senior from Spaulding testified last Tuesday before the Senate Appropriations committee: "the SAP kept me from dropping out of school and out of jail."

3. **Emergency Room Visits/Health Care Costs:** Students who are high risk-those that use substances- are at a much higher likelihood of getting poorer grades; and at risk for dropping out; they are also more likely to end up in the E. R.; one report quoted each visit costing \$2,569/ even a low estimate of \$500 per E.R. visit will cost Vermont thousands; A 2009 BISCHA study of 14 Inpatient hospital cost for adults with an untreated alcohol or drug abuse without major complications says the average cost is \$8,423 with 401 cases reported. I realize these are inpatient cases but just two days of care inpatient is nearly equivalent to one SAP in a school for the full year.
4. **Suicide:** The second leading cause of death for our VT youth ages 14-22 is suicide; in 2008 we had 80 attempts that required hospitalization; SAP's are trained in suicide screening and are currently part of a SAMHSA grant referring students daily for interventions services. Last year we referred over 4,000 students for some type of outside service; mental health services were #1.

One principal I talked to said that in the last 5 years 85% of the drop outs in his school did so because of significant drug and alcohol dependencies/or serious mental health issues.

5. **Prevention: For each dollar we spend on prevention & intervention services we save \$18 per \$1 invested. (SAMHSA 2009 Report).** Can we afford to eliminate SAP's in our schools? What will be the true cost to VT?

The true cost is the loss of productive lives dropping out, being incarcerated, ending up in the E.R. or dying. Can we really afford to do this; at what savings?

The youth voices of Vermont thank you for my time today.

Respectfully submitted,
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