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Over the past year, individuals have been hit with a series of cascading crises; the historic floods of July 2023, rising costs and inflation, the housing crisis, and the end of many federal supports including the expanded SNAP/3SquaresVT emergency allotments.

In April of 2023, **72,000 Vermonters saw a significant drop in their monthly SNAP benefits as Congress ended the pandemic Emergency Allotments.** These Emergency Allotments, totaling around \$6.5 million each month, boosted monthly benefits for all households receiving 3SquaresVT. When these allotments ended, most households experienced a monthly loss of benefits ranging from \$100 to \$500, while some faced even greater cuts of up to \$2,000 each month. Many older adults saw a drop in benefits from \$280 to a mere \$23. This change happened abruptly, and gave families little time to prepare. The loss in benefits hit at a devastating time of high food and energy costs, and families are still struggling to recover.

During the past year, Hunger Free Vermont identified additional concern, through conversations with lawmakers, community members, and other stakeholders, to support those communities who are most-impacted by these challenges. These communities include: older Vermonters, homeless individuals, college students, single parents with children, and 3SquaresVT recipients generally.

To address these concerns, we are proposing to “Give 3SquaresVT a Boost!” through the following 3 actions listed on the reverse side:





Action 1: The College Student Option:

In addition to income and other eligibility criteria, college and graduate students enrolled at least half-time in an institute of higher education must meet or prove they are exempt from a harsh and burdensome student work requirement. This “work for food” rule requires, for example, students to report employment for an average of 20 hours/week. While states have the authority to exempt community college students from this rule, we currently do not have this practice in Vermont, and therefore are missing an important opportunity to support students who are the future of Vermont’s workforce—and more importantly, deserve to not go hungry.

Hunger Free Vermont is working with the Administration and other interested stakeholders to implement this option.

Legislative ask:
No legislative action necessary.



Action 2: The Restaurant Meals Program:

The Restaurant Meals Program is run through the USDA Food and Nutrition Service (FNS), and allows certain SNAP recipients to use their benefits at approved restaurants.

To qualify, the SNAP recipients must be:

- Elderly (*60 years of age or older*);
- Disabled (*receives disability or blindness payments or receives disability retirement benefits from a governmental agency because of a disability considered permanent*);
- Homeless;
- or be the spouse of a SNAP recipient who meets one of the above criteria

For restaurants to qualify, they must get approval from the State of Vermont as well as FNS. Each State can set their own rules for how many and which restaurants can participate.

Legislative ask:
Adequate staffing for AHS to implement the Restaurant Meals Program, and financial support for onboarding restaurants, including TA, equipment, and software costs.



Action 3: Give 3SquaresVT a Boost:

The existing formula for calculating the SNAP Minimum Benefit is inadequate, outdated, and only guaranteed for household sizes of one and two. The current guaranteed minimum benefit is a mere \$23 monthly, while households greater than two may receive a benefit as low as \$1 each month. To address this, we are proposing raising the minimum benefit by changing the formula to the following:

- Calculate the Minimum Benefit based on the USDA Moderate Food Plan, consistent with the Joint Fiscal Office Basic Needs Budget.
- The Minimum Benefit will represent 30% of the cost of the Moderate Food Plan
- ALL SNAP household benefits will be raised to ensure each household receives a monthly amount no less than 30% of the Moderate Food Plan

Legislative ask:
Pass legislation enshrining this formula into statute.