



**Testimony of Julia Burgess, SASH Coordinator at Downstreet Housing and Community Development
January 30, 2023**

Hello, my name is Julia Burgess and I am a SASH Coordinator with Downstreet Housing and Community Development. Thank you for the opportunity to speak here today.

Support and Services at Home, or “SASH,” is a free health and wellness program that provides a continuum of care to support residents across the state of Vermont who qualify for Medicare. Downstreet’s SASH program area is in central Vermont, and includes Washington, Orange, and Lamoille counties. The primary population that I serve is older adults, and many of the SASH participants that I work with struggle every month to afford their basic needs, including groceries and medications, and other financial obligations.

Reduced benefits would severely impact our SASH participants and this already vulnerable population.

Therefore, I am here today to ask you to support the request for \$5 million in base funding in the FY25 budget for the Vermont Foodbank to purchase food and support community-based partners, to establish a SNAP Restaurant Meals Program in Vermont and create a plan to increase the minimum benefit level, the request for \$2 million in base funding to support the Older Vermonters Nutrition Program, and NOFA-VT’s request for \$478,500 in base funding for Crop Cash Plus and Farm Share.

One of the ways we support our SASH participants is through a partnership with The Vermont Foodbank. Because of this collaboration, we are able to provide many older adults with fresh fruit and vegetables. The request for \$5 million in base funding in the FY2025 budget for the Vermont Foodbank would directly support community-based partners like Downstreet.

The SASH program also partners with many local and state non-profit agencies which provide vital care for our participants. One such organization is the Central Vermont Council on Aging, which provides case management services to some of our participants. I hope you will consider supporting the allocation of \$2 million in base funding for the Vermont-area agencies on aging, to help support the increasing demand for the Meals on Wheels program to meet the nutritional needs of the growing demographic of older Vermonters.

I also ask that you support S. 215 or H. 703, which seek to establish a Restaurant Meals Program for SNAP participants in Vermont and direct the state SNAP agency to produce a transition plan to increase the SNAP minimum benefit amount for all participants. This legislation would act as another way to ensure our most vulnerable neighbors have access to a warm meal.

Finally, one of the more popular programs that SASH participates in is the Senior Farm Share program through NOFA-VT. This program helps not only our participants, but also local farms by partnering to provide fresh, healthy vegetables to older adults throughout the state. This is why I ask for your support for \$478,500 in base funding to strengthen Vermont Farm Viability and Address Food Security by sustaining two proven NOFA-VT programs: Crop Cash Plus and Farm Share.

To restate, I am here today to ask you to support the request for \$5 million in base funding in the FY25 budget for the Vermont Foodbank, to establish a SNAP Restaurant Meals Program in Vermont and create a plan to increase the minimum benefit level, the request for \$2 million in base funding to support the Older Vermonters Nutrition Program, and NOFA-VT's request for \$478,500 in base funding for Crop Cash Plus and Farm Share.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak to you about the importance of these requests, and to show that feeding our most vulnerable residents is a priority for our legislature and our state.

Thank you for your time.