

Thank you for allowing me this time to speak to you. My name is Matthew Carey I live in Brattleboro where I work at Foodworks - a local food shelf. I would like to ask for 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.
- Establish a SNAP Restaurant Meals Program in Vermont and create a plan to increase the minimum benefit level
- \$2 million in base funding to support the Older Vermonters Nutrition Program
- Support NOFA-VT's request for \$478,500 in base funding for Crop Cash Plus and Farm Share

I came here today to advocate for these requests because food insecurity is an issue deeply significant to me.

I'm no stranger to going hungry. Growing up it was me, my father and my three siblings. Whenever we did have food, it was mostly limited to junk food and TV dinners. I rarely saw 3 meals in a day, only occasionally eating breakfast and never having lunch outside of the free ones that we got at school.

Food Stamps have been a constant throughout my life. My father only worked sporadically so it was often our only budget for food except for the occasional trip to a food shelf and the times where community members took pity on us and donated something. It all happened in a cycle we would eat alright for the first week or two of the month but then go hungry until our card re-upped again.

About 2 years ago we found ourselves homeless and became tenants of Vermont's hotel program. This wasn't my first time being homeless, but I was much younger then, this time around it has fallen on me to take care of all the shopping, and trying to budget out the entire month to feed 5 people isn't easy nor was it a responsibility I was prepared for, but what we were receiving in 3 squares benefits along local food programs allowed us to eat comfortably.

Things were made much worse when the first of the month came around last March and our food stamps benefits had been abruptly slashed to a third of what we had been getting, and all of a sudden, food, which had been a challenge, became a crisis again. To make matters worse, programs that had been helping to supplement our food, like the Everyone Eats program, started shutting down.

Around that time, I had started volunteering at Foodworks and while I had been to food shelves before this was my first time being on this side of it and I was taken aback. Something about being there helping instead of being helped not just coming and going but seeing everyone else come and go allowed me for the first time see this problem as larger than myself

I had always known that other people were going through the same things I was but while you're struggling you only tend to think about yourself "what am I going to do" "where is my next meal gonna come from" "who can help me" but being there allowed me to see how much of a burden financially and emotionally food insecurity is to people and how heavily they rely on their SNAP benefits and how that program was falling short.

And because of that, the people in my community, including myself, had to rely on other sources like Foodworks, local soup kitchens, and the Crop Cash program, which allowed food stamps to go farther. I spend 5 days talking to and interacting with people who are struggling just as badly as I was, day to day trying to keep themselves and their families afloat.

And It's really disheartening . Programs like ours help our community immensely but they can't do everything. Especially now as we try to serve more people than ever it's clear not enough is being done to help. That's why I ask you again, please.

- 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.
- Establish a SNAP Restaurant Meals Program in Vermont and create a plan to increase the minimum benefit level
- \$2 million in base funding to support the Older Vermonters Nutrition Program
- Support NOFA-VT's request for \$478,500 in base funding for Crop Cash Plus and Farm Share

Thank you for your time and your consideration