

Stephanie Bergen, MS, RD, CD
Public Health Programs Administrator
Vermont Department of Health

Testimony for House Committee on Agriculture, Food Resiliency, and Forestry

Good morning, and it's a pleasure to virtually be with you today -

I'm Stephanie Bergen and I'm a resident of Colchester, and I'm a registered dietitian with the Vermont Department of Health's Division of Health Promotion and Disease Prevention.

The Department of Health has been a proud partner on this roadmap from the start, helping to launch the roadmap's development with \$125,000 of CDC COVID Health Disparities funds, and that's because we recognize that food security is imperative for human health and development, as well as directly associated with chronic disease prevalence. Our research at VDH shows that food security status has a significant impact on quality of life – including physical health, mental health, and social and emotional support. We also know that not having access to food disproportionately impacts members of our community – more specifically, our BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ communities, as well as Vermonters living with a disability have a harder time putting food on the table.

Examples of the Department of Health's work, as it pertains to the roadmap and food and nutrition security generally, include:

- Administering direct service programs like You First and the well-known Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program that serves 7,000 families across the state and provides nutrition education, nourishing food, breastfeeding support, and healthcare referrals.
- Additionally, SNAP-Ed funds and our Healthy Community Design work supports organizations and municipalities across the state to enhance consistent, dignified access to nourishing, adequate, and culturally responsive food today and in the future.

This roadmap is so impactful and exciting, in part, because it brings all of the elements of our food system together to elevate a crucial need - *Vermonters having enough food*. And not just having enough food but nourishing and culturally appropriate food to really thrive.

The Department of Health supports the roadmap's comprehensive strategies to achieving food security, all of which are derived from the voices of people living in Vermont and many of which are already underway. We are grateful for the opportunity to speak with you today, bringing to life the public and private collaboration that made this roadmap possible.

Thank you so much for your time.