



**Capstone Community Action Food Shelf**

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My name is Liz Scharf, I am a resident of Middlesex, and I am the Director of Community Economic Development and Food Security at Capstone Community Action in Barre, VT. Capstone is one of five statewide community action agencies supporting low and moderate income Vermonters with programs and services that help alleviate the effects of poverty, and provide ladders to economic self-sufficiency. Programs include emergency housing services, fuel assistance, Head Start Early Childcare programs, Economic Development initiative which include Microbusiness development coaching, financial and energy coaching, Volunteer Income Tax Assistance Program, Weatherization services, and food supports.

**I have been invited today to express my strong support of the SNAP 3-Squares Vermont program, and to support the Vermont Food Bank's request for \$3,000,000 in base funding, and to support universal meals for Vermont's schoolchildren.**

Capstone manages central Vermont's largest food shelf, providing shelf-stable grocery items, fresh fruit and vegetables, meat and dairy products gleaned by the Vermont Food Bank from grocery stores and balanced meals made by our Community Kitchen Academy workforce development training program. **Last calendar year, 2022, our food shelf served 1075 Vermont families, made up of 2270 family members that included 627 children and nearly 4500 visits to our food shelf.** More starkly, over the past 4 months, October-January, we have seen a 55% increase in the number of visits to our food shelf from the previous time period 1 year ago, a 30% increase in families using our shelf, and a 52% increase in the number of children served—which means more families are visiting our

food shelf than last year at the same time. 50% of visitors reported receiving 3 Squares.

**There's a reason fewer people used our food shelf a year ago at this same time:**

1. Pandemic stimulus monies were in effect in 2021
2. Child Tax Credit monthly allotments were in effect the second half of 2021, and double the amount from previous years. In addition, families who had never been eligible for the CTC, who are the poorest Vermont families, finally received the credit.
3. SNAP 3 Squares Emergency Allotment monies were in effect.

With the end of pandemic aid, and the reverting back to the regular CTC which benefits working families only, inflation, and the rising cost of groceries, it is no surprise that we are seeing increased participation in our food shelf.

We have yet to see the impact of how the end of the SNAP Emergency Allotment, which was around \$82/person/month, will affect our numbers at our food shelf. But, as our data indicates, we anticipate that the need for charitable food will increase.

With the end of the SNAP Emergency Allotment, the burden of feeding our lowest income Vermonters is merely shifted to the charitable food system and does not solve the problem of food insecurity. As a recent study by the Brookings Institution noted here

[https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Child-Tax-Credit-Report-Final\\_Updated.pdf](https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Child-Tax-Credit-Report-Final_Updated.pdf), the third most common use of the extra money was to purchase food and the expanded CTC significantly improved food security and healthy eating among those eligible.

Compared to ineligible households, CTC-eligible households were: 1.3 times more likely to increase fruit consumption, 1.5 times more likely to increase meat and protein consumption, 1.4 times more likely to report increased ability to afford balanced meals. This study demonstrates that

more cash means more healthy eating. The end of the Emergency Allotment SNAP benefit will mean there is less money to spend on nutritious food for our most vulnerable Vermonters.

**As Vermont legislatures, you may not be able to change the narrative around the SNAP emergency allotments; however, by supporting the Foodbanks' request for \$3,000,000 which helps support the increase cost in running our food shelf, and supporting universal school meals for Vermont children, you will be contributing to the health and well-being of low and moderate income Vermonters. Thank you for this opportunity to testify.**