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I am John Gorton from Fairfield, and I am here to ask you to **Please support the Foodbank's request for $5 million in base funding to address the sustained, increased need for access to food in communities throughout Vermont.**

- **Fully fund the Vermonters Feeding Vermonters Program ($2 million)**
- **Support Vermont Foodbank network partner food shelves and meal sites ($2 million)**
- **Support for Ready Response for food access in emergencies ($1 million)**

I would like to describe how important the budget of the Vermont Foodbank is to those of us who are boots on the ground working to create better food security for everyone in Vermont. I am a US Naval Academy graduate, retired from active duty in nuclear submarines, retired from providing engineering ship design support to the navy as a Dept of Defense contractor, and semi retired as a farmer. I am currently very active in social service work including the FGI Community Partnership, FGI Hunger Council, Franklin County Food Shelf Alliance, and FGI Building Bright Futures Council, and the Farm to Early Childhood Coalition. And, most important to this testimony, I am a certified lay servant in the United Methodist Church and with support from about 20 other volunteers, I run the Sheldon Methodist Church Food Shelf. We are a network partner of the Vermont Foodbank.

The Sheldon Food Shelf is currently serving between 400 and 450 families, over 1200 people, distributing between 20,000 and 25,000 lbs of food per month. We are open 4 days a week and operate a variety of programs to reach families. We stock a "share refrigerator" at the Sheldon Elementary School, we distributed summer meal boxes for school children this summer (1765 boxes, 24710 meals), we completed a grant thru Bi-State PC to collaborate with NOTCH and provide diet specific foods for people with chronic health conditions. We were recently awarded a grant to support 11 Early Childhood Educators in Franklin County to buy local foods for their day care operations. During the recent SNAP benefit crisis due to the government shutdown, we were able to take the emergency funding provided to us from the Foodbank thru the Vermont emergency allocation to obtain discount priced bulk food items to provide to clients in October and November.

To put our effort into sobering financial perspective:

For the year 2025, the food we distributed represents between $75K and $80K worth of food every month, close to a million dollars of food for the year. We did that on an operating budget of about $55,000. For 2025 we saw a 10% increase in client demand. Since the New Year we have had over a dozen families who never accessed a food shelf in their lives asking for food help and see demand growing monthly with no end in sight, especially if SNAP benefit funding is reduced. We continue to be

able to obtain the quantities of food needed to meet demand but it has become increasingly challenging, and our selection has become very limited. Right now, for example, we have canned pinto beans, black beans, and refried beans, and dry lentils and Great Northern Beans but the only canned spinach for vegetable and canned apricots for fruit! We are fortunate to have access to some nice frozen veggies and frozen fruit cups. Frozen meat availability can be extremely variable.

Over 85% of the food we provide our clients comes from or thru the VT Foodbank. All three parts of their asks are important to our work as a food shelf. Their funding is the foundation which we leverage to accomplish what we do. We are one of over 200 "network partners" of the VT Foodbank. The specific statistics and operating programs of other partners are different, but the key result is the same for all of us. Collectively we Foodbank Network Partners would multiply the $5 million of VT Foodbank funding into tens of millions of dollars in direct food aid to families and children in every community all across this state. It is a return on investment that is hard to beat.

In closing I would like to share not "a story" but what I think is "the story". We used to call ourselves an "emergency food shelf". A few families a month came to us when they had a car breakdown, appliance failure, medical situation, or some other incident that busted their budget that month. No longer - we are now a "grocery store" for several hundred families monthly who consistently thank us profusely for being treated like friend and family and for the help they get and state unabashedly "they wouldn't be able to feed their families if it weren't for what they get at this food shelf".

I encourage you to include this Vermont Foodbank $5 million budget request, including $2 million in support for Foodbank network partners like the Sheldon Methodist Church Food Shelf, to address the sustained, increased need for food access in communities throughout Vermont in the FY2025 budget.

Thank You,

John Gorton