

Chairs, committees, thank you for your time. My name is Carrie Stahler, I live in Lyndon and I work for the Vermont Foodbank.

I'm here to ask you to 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.

Vermonters experienced drastic and devastating events in 2023 that have had lasting impacts on food security: the end of increased 3SquaresVT benefits, record-high inflation and food costs, and catastrophic flooding, to name a few. Recovery from these cascading crises is more than any of our community organizations, partners or neighbors can do on their own.

To explain this better, I would like to share the words of Emily Ahtúnan, a Montpelier resident, with her permission. She has also submitted written testimony to you:

As a disabled Vermonter, my connection to this cause is rooted in the reality of relying on food assistance, weaving together resources like 3SquaresVT, Meals on Wheels through the Montpelier Meals Program, and weekly home deliveries from the Montpelier Food Pantry to sustain me through each week and month. With the end of the pandemic EBT monthly benefit, there has been a drastic monthly decrease in my 3SquaresVT assistance. Consequently, my dependence on my local food pantry and Meals on Wheels has significantly increased. Previously receiving \$281.00 a month in pandemic 3SquaresVT allowed me to purchase healthy, month-long food supplies. Now, with a \$23.00/month 3Squares benefit, I rely on Meals on Wheels Monday-Friday and a weekly home delivery from the Montpelier Food Pantry. For context, it's noteworthy that Meals on Wheels costs me \$50.00/month out of pocket, almost twice my current 3SquareVT monthly benefit....

As a recipient of food from the pantry, I've witnessed the impact of the Vermont Foodbank's commitment to ensuring that no Vermonter goes hungry. My struggles are not unique, as many in our communities are grappling with decreased EBT/SNAP allotments, leaving families and individuals with limited resources to put food on the table.

Unfortunately, Emily's experiences are not unique. [A team at UVM found that 2 in 5, or 40%, of people in Vermont had experienced food insecurity in 2022.](#) The challenges of 2023 make it unlikely that food security has improved since this data was released. In fact, we hear from our network of food shelves and meal sites that more people are visiting more frequently. Partners like Capstone in Barre report they **served 165% more families in 2023** than in 2021. This number is not unusual - we hear similar reports from across the state.

The Foodbank and its network partners are a safety net to put food on our neighbors' tables. But our network cannot fill the gap alone. The state of Vermont can provide food security for everyone in Vermont. We and willing partners for the state of Vermont and **we need financial**

support to continue purchasing and distributing food that meets this increased need. I ask that you 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.

Thank you for your time.