

H.271: Protect 3SquaresVT Program Integrity and Ensure Governmental Transparency

3SquaresVT must remain strong and accessible in the face of federal changes

3SquaresVT (known nationally as SNAP) is a crucial program that **helps nearly 78,000 Vermonters** put food on their table every month. It is a federally funded program that is administered by the Agency of Human Services (AHS). SNAP is different in each state because the state administrations have the authority to make decisions about who is eligible for benefits, how much money they can receive, and how they access the program. Unlike many programs administered by state agencies, AHS has the authority to make these kinds of changes to 3SquaresVT without informing clients, the public, experts in the field, or Vermont legislators ahead of time.

We are fortunate that the current administration is transparent in its work, collaborates with advocates and service providers, and supports a strong and accessible 3SquaresVT program. However, this could change quickly if the program is put under great pressure, especially if the administration is faced with massive cuts to SNAP from the federal government. Neighboring states that historically supported this federal program have rapidly changed their position and are implementing devastating new rules that are limiting access for those in need and increasing administrative costs. **The budgets and policy changes being proposed in D.C. feature significant changes and cuts to the program, including requiring Vermont to pay \$29 million into the SNAP program annually.** If passed, these changes would put significant financial pressure on Vermont's ability to provide 3SquaresVT benefits to all who are eligible and force AHS to make difficult decisions about the program. Additionally, legislation that is making its way through Congress, like the recently passed tax reform, will have dire consequences for SNAP funding.

H.271 supports 3SquaresVT and ensures transparency by requiring proposed changes that would limit Vermonters' access to 3SquaresVT be shared with the public before implementation to allow for legislative, community, and expert input during a public comment period.

3SquaresVT is vital to Vermonters' health and economic security

3SquaresVT is the most effective program combating hunger in the nation. Every day, nearly 78,000 Vermonters rely on 3SquaresVT benefits to purchase groceries and put nutritious meals on their table. 3SquaresVT has been proven to lift families out of poverty, supplementing low wages and supporting people unable to work. The program is as effective as a vaccine for children's health and helps older Vermonters stay healthy and independent as they age. Further, it is an essential piece of our economy. As a federally funded program, 3SquaresVT brings over \$110 million into the state each year. This money is spent locally at grocery stores, farmers markets, and general stores, supporting our local business owners and farmers. It is the only program available to help any Vermonter who is income eligible afford groceries. If access is restricted or benefits are cut, thousands of Vermonters will go hungry. Even more, money that is currently being used to pay for heat, housing, transportation, and healthcare, will be stretched even further, putting more Vermonters at risk of homelessness and serious health costs.