

House General, Housing, & Military Affairs Committee

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Hunger Free Vermont

- I've brought three charts to illustrate some of what we've been thinking about as anti-hunger advocates as we've seen Vermont come out of the Great Recession.
- The first chart is from the Center on Budget & Policy Priorities to illustrate the 3SquaresVT (SNAP) program usage throughout the recession in relationship to TANF, the employment rate, and the unemployment rate. As you can see, TANF being a block grant (blue line at the bottom) did not do much to respond to unemployment. The SNAP program is an entitlement program and it responded to the need. However, our biggest concern is the drop in unemployment yet still a very high participation in the SNAP program.
- More and more we see working families using the SNAP program as an income support for low-wage work. Many who we work with across the state share that this is very **demoralizing**. They don't want to be reliant on government programs to meet their basic needs.
- It is not these workers faults as most are led by two full-time workers and yet cannot make ends meet.
- The second chart is of national occupational growth rates starting with 2001 was a baseline. As you can see, the majority of the jobs lost during the recession are mid-wage jobs. An example might be a manager or a specialized factory worker where incomes are well above minimum wage. Post-recession, the majority of the jobs that have been added back in to the economy are actually low-wage jobs and higher wage occupations. Low-wage jobs are jobs that pay close to the minimum wage mostly in the service sector. The higher wage jobs often require a great deal of education and training.
- This net change in occupational employment is further illustrated by the third chart which shows these gains and losses.
- So as an anti-hunger organization, here is our dilemma. When people need 3SquaresVT, they are grateful for it and use it wisely. However, when people get jobs, they don't want to be using these benefits forever. They want to use a benefit program like 3SquaresVT for the springboard it is designed to be. Having a job and sustaining your family is core to a person's dignity.
- Raising the minimum wage is a critical strategy to ending hunger in Vermont, but it is not the only strategy to ending this problem. Hunger Free Vermont is also supportive of increasing child care subsidies, ensuring access to paid family leave, and increasing access to afterschool programming. As an organization we have taken the lead statewide to help schools provide universal free school meals in our highest poverty areas so that families on the edge of affordability have access to good food. The combination of increased wages for low-income workers, increased community support systems, and a strong safety for when people need it is comprehensive strategy we see as providing a very bright and dignified future for Vermonters.