



38 Eastwood Drive, Suite 100
South Burlington, VT 05403

P: (802) 865-0255
F: (802) 865-0266
HungerFreeVT.org

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Testimony submitted by Faye Mack

Advocacy & Education Director of Hunger Free Vermont

fmack@hungerfreevt.org / 802-231-1071

Good afternoon, my name is Faye Mack, I am the Advocacy and Education Director of Hunger Free Vermont. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today and your work on behalf of Vermonters. Hunger Free Vermont is the state's advocacy organization dedicated to ending the injustice of malnutrition and hunger for all Vermonters. Over the last 25 years, Hunger Free Vermont has helped our state make the most of federal nutrition programs like 3SquaresVT and school breakfast and lunch, while also working to help more Vermonters reach economic security so that they do not need to rely on 3SquaresVT and the emergency food system to put food on their table.

I am here today to share our support for opportunities in this legislative session to invest in programs and initiatives that are crucial to the economic security of Vermonters and their ability to not only survive in our state, but also to thrive. Hunger does not occur in isolation, and we will never fully end hunger by only addressing how Vermonters are putting food on their table today, this week, or even next month. We work in coalition with many partner organizations to ensure Vermonters have a truly adequate safety net available to them in times of need, and systems and structures in place to support stable, long-term economic security. I am here today, and a colleague will be here tomorrow, in that vein.

Today, I would like to express Hunger Free Vermont's strong support for fully funding Reach Up grants, afterschool programming, and the early childhood proposals that make up H.194.

Funding Reach Up: The Reach Up program is a critical support for many of Vermont's most vulnerable children. The goal of the program is to "improve the well-being of children by providing for their basic needs", yet current grants only cover an average of about 35% of participants' basic needs. It is nearly impossible for a family to take the steps necessary to move out of poverty when their focus is on their ability to pay their bills, put food on the table, and get by day-by-day. As caseloads for Reach Up decline, rather than view the funding not being spent as "caseload savings" and reduce the budget for Reach Up, we encourage you to see this as an opportunity to better meet the goal of the program by increasing benefits for current and future participants.

Funding Afterschool Programming: Thank you for your investment of \$600,000 into afterschool programming as a prevention tool last year. Afterschool programming is crucial to the success of our youth, and it is also a key tool in ensuring youth have access to nutritious food, as many afterschool programs serve meals and snacks using federal nutrition programs. This can be the last nutritious food children have access to before returning to school the next day. Please consider appropriating \$2.5 million annually so that all Vermont youth have access to high-quality third space programs and are also able to access the nutritious food they need to learn and grow.

Funding Early Childhood: Finally, please support support full funding for H.194. An affordable high-quality childcare system that pays providers well has broad ripple effects throughout our communities, including in our children's — and our workers' — access to food and nutrition.

These investments are important parts to a holistic approach that is needed if we are to truly end hunger, help Vermonters meet their basic needs, and help more Vermonters reach stable, long-term economic stability.
Thank you.