

Andrea Stander, Policy Consultant for Rural Vermont

8/27/20 Testimony at FY21 Budget Hearing

Good afternoon and thank you for the opportunity to offer comments today. My name is Andrea Stander, I live in Montpelier and I am a Policy Consultant for Rural Vermont. Before I begin, I would like to express my deep appreciation for the hard work of both the Appropriations Committees and indeed the entire legislature. Your jobs are difficult in ordinary times and what we are all living through is surely the opposite of ordinary.

There are two issues I would like to comment on:

First, I urge both Appropriations Committees and the entire legislature to support the Governor's proposal to allocate \$2 million in state funds to provide parity in COVID relief for Vermont's immigrant residents – many of whom were deemed essential workers at the start of this pandemic – but who were also deemed ineligible, because of their status, to receive the federal COVID stimulus checks like the rest of us. **This is an injustice that Vermont must rectify.** Furthermore I urge the legislature to do everything it can to increase the amount recommended by the Administration so that all Vermont immigrant residents – many of whom are spouses or children born in the US – are treated fairly – it is the least we can do in these times.

Second, I ask that the Appropriations Committees accept recommendations that I believe will be forthcoming from your Agricultural Committees to make crucial technical amendments to the COVID relief funding programs that were created last June to help farms and other agricultural and food businesses. These enterprises, often run by just one or two extremely hardworking Vermonters, are the backbone of Vermont's food system and they have struggled to continue to provide high quality food to us all in the face of enormous challenges. These changes will ensure that they too are treated fairly. In the early days of the pandemic, when the deep flaws of our national & global food supply systems were painfully revealed, Vermont farmers and food producers stepped up in unprecedented ways not only to feed those who sought more reliable locally produced food, but they also made huge contributions to our charitable food system which continues to see unprecedented demand. Thank you for your time and consideration.