



38 Eastwood Drive, Suite 100  
South Burlington, VT 05403

P: (802) 865-0255  
F: (802) 865-0266  
[HungerFreeVT.org](http://HungerFreeVT.org)

April 16, 2019

Senate Committee on Appropriations  
H.542 - Advocates Hearing

Testimony submitted by Faye Mack  
Advocacy & Education Director of Hunger Free Vermont  
[fmack@hungerfreevt.org](mailto:fmack@hungerfreevt.org) / 802-231-1071

Good afternoon, my name is Faye Mack, I am the Advocacy and Education Director at Hunger Free Vermont. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today and for your work on behalf of all Vermonters. Over the last 25 years, Hunger Free Vermont has helped Vermont 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 fewer people 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 will help Vermonters access nutritious food and that are crucial to the economic security of Vermonters. Hunger Free Vermont strongly supports funding for Farm to School, Reach Up grants, and nutrition programs that serve older Vermonters.

**Farm to School:** Farm to School is a triple-win. With modest funding, Farm to School helps children of all financial backgrounds have access to nutritious food and educates them about where healthy and local food comes from and how to obtain and cook it. It strengthens and supports school meal programs, and the increased local purchasing that comes from Farm to School and strong school meal programs directly supports our local farmers and producers. Please support the House increase of \$50,000 to bring Farm to School back to level-funding and please also increase Farm to School funding by \$75,000 for FY20 so we can continue to support more schools and early childhood providers directly.

**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 for Vermont's lowest-income families, current grants only cover about 35% of what's needed to cover basic needs. It is nearly impossible for a family to take the steps necessary to move out of poverty when their focus is on the stress in trying to pay their bills, put food on the table, and get by day-by-day. An increase in grants to levels that provide for basic needs is desperately needed. An increase of \$1 million would boost the average family grant by \$25 per month. This is not a lot, but it is enough to make a small difference — to allow a family to catch up a bit more on bills, or to afford more fruits and vegetables.

**Older Vermonter Nutrition Programs:** Access to good nutrition is not only important for children as their brains and bodies develop and grow — it is crucial throughout an individual's life. As Vermonters age, being able to eat a nutritious diet is critical to their ability to remain healthy and independent — to age in their homes and to

continue as an active member in their communities and families. Meal programs for older Vermonters help them do just that — and also support vital socialization and connections with friends and neighbors. We ask that you fully invest in the nutrition programs for older Vermonters with an appropriation of \$650,000.

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. Vermonters need 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. These three investments that I am highlighting today are important parts of the holistic approach that is needed to end hunger, lift Vermonters out of poverty, and ensure Vermont is a place where we can all thrive. I urge you to take the holistic approach when considering these requests and other funding requests. Thank you.