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Testimony on Nutrition Insecurity for Vermont Senate Agriculture Committee and Vermont House  
Agriculture and Forestry Committee

Good morning senators/representatives. My name is Trevor Lowell and I'm joining you all from beautiful Topsham Vermont. I'm the Farm to Institution Program Manager at the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets where I help facilitate connections between Vermont public and private institutions and local farmers and producers through state-funded grant programs. I'm also the Agricultural Development Division's lead on issues related to food access and nutrition insecurity.

I appreciate the opportunity to talk with you all this morning and to share my perspective on the various ways in which our state is working to address nutrition insecurity. Making sure all Vermonters have access to enough nutritious and culturally appropriate food to meet their basic needs is a herculean undertaking and the ways in which we go about this are many. There are dozens of public and private partners across the state, operating multitudes of programs designed to help Vermonters meet their nutritional needs.

Shortly after the pandemic began in March of 2020, the State Emergency Operations Center, in partnership with the Agency of Education, stood up a bi-weekly meeting of various stakeholders who were engaged, in one way or another, in addressing hunger and nutrition insecurity. This new group, dubbed the Mass Feeding group, started looking for ways to address the alarming growth in nutrition insecurity as a result of the pandemic. Every time the group met to discuss these issues, several more names were added to the meeting invite list. What started as a small group of mostly state employees, quickly expanded to a large coalition of stakeholders from across the state.

The rapid expansion of the Mass Feeding group showed just how many people and organizations are involved in combatting hunger and nutrition insecurity in Vermont. The other thing it demonstrated was the value of having a space where all these various stakeholders could come together to share ideas and discuss how to best coordinate all the various initiatives in the nutrition security space.

Originally conceived of as a temporary group focused on an acute pandemic related problem, the Mass Feeding group continues to this day. As more voices join the group, the value of having a dedicated space to discuss coordinated statewide anti-hunger strategies is more salient than ever.

As Becka and her team continue their critical work of creating a statewide nutrition security plan for Vermont, it's important for us to consider how that plan will be implemented and what structures will best facilitate the success of that implementation. Who will own that work? Where will decisions be made and how will these various efforts be coordinated so as to maximize the impact of this vital work?

Thank you for your time. I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.

