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Good afternoon.

My name is Anore Horton, I live in Williston, and I am the Executive Director at Hunger Free Vermont.

Hunger Free Vermont asks you to support the work of the Vermont Foodbank and their 300 statewide network partners with \$6 million in one-time funds from FY22 budget adjustment to address ongoing, increased food insecurity. These funds are critically needed right now. Many special federal COVID-19 pandemic support programs have ended, including expanded unemployment, extra food distributions, and the expanded child tax credit, to name just three that very directly affect the ability of Vermont families and individuals to afford or acquire sufficient healthy food. Hunger and food insecurity are, tragically, quickly on the rise again across our state, and therefore additional funding for hunger relief is an urgent need.

While 3SquaresVT, WIC, and expanded Meals on Wheels are still available, and thankfully, school meal programs are still operating universally under temporary federal waivers, the extended crisis of this pandemic is revealing just how many people in Vermont are not eligible for these federal nutrition programs, yet are still experiencing hunger. The high cost of living in our state, exacerbated by the current inflation of food prices, means that many people are over-income for federal nutrition programs, but still too low income to afford enough food, or to be able to travel to access it. The food distribution efforts of the Vermont Foodbank have therefore been absolutely essential in mitigating the hunger emergency we have been in throughout this pandemic.

This hunger crisis is much too great and long-lasting for charitable organizations and private philanthropy to solve without government assistance, and previous economic crises have shown us that the recovery of food security lags well behind other basic wellbeing indicators for low-income working families. Furthermore, providing for the basic needs of us all is a collective responsibility and obligation that government must shoulder, and that only government *can* shoulder.

Please support the work of The Vermont Foodbank with an appropriation of \$6 million to ensure that the basic need of providing food to our neighbors is supported while this pandemic continues to challenge our communities. This request meets the requirements for ARPA Funds by both responding to the public health crisis and addressing the negative economic impacts of the pandemic.

Thank you so much for your time and attention to this important issue.