

Good evening and thank you for your time tonight.

My name is Carrie Stahler, I live in Lyndon and I am the Government and Public Affairs Officer for the Vermont Foodbank.

I'm here to ask that you support the Vermont Foodbank and our 300 statewide partners with \$6 million in one-time funds from Fiscal Year 23 budget to continue to address the ongoing, increased food insecurity we are seeing across the state. This funding will continue the work you funded in the Budget Adjustment Act and directly addresses the needs of our most vulnerable neighbors.

Even as we all continue to navigate new phases of the pandemic, our neighbors' need for food continues. The extended nature of this crisis is stressing our social systems, many of which rely on volunteers and philanthropic giving. While there are federal support programs like SNAP, this crisis has revealed just how many of our neighbors are not eligible for federal nutrition programs. The support of the state is critical to addressing the prolonged and heightened hunger crisis across the state and to fill the gap for those who cannot access federal programs.

Previous economic crises have shown that food security lags other indicators of wellbeing for low-income, working families. When the Great Recession struck in 2008, it took 10 years for Vermont to return to the pre-recession levels of food security. In 2019, 9.6% of Vermonters were food insecure. That number was already too high, and the latest data shows the rate of food insecurity at 27% in Vermont.

As many sectors return to normal, as a state we cannot forget our neighbors who are experiencing food insecurity. We need the state to lead the fight to ensure that our neighbors have the food they need. The Vermont Foodbank stands ready to work together with the state using ARPA funding to address this need. Our request meets ARPA requirements and Vermont statute regarding the purpose of the budget: to recognize every person's need for food.

Please support our neighbors across the state with an appropriation of \$6 million to the Vermont Foodbank to address the ongoing food security crisis.

Thank you for your time,

Carrie Stahler
Government and Public Affairs Officer
The Vermont Foodbank