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My name is Cassie Fraser, I am the Director of Marketing for The Abbey Group, a food service management company headquartered out of Sheldon, VT that feeds many of the schools across our state. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

I strongly support the governor's recommendation to fund the Local Purchasing Incentive Program at \$500,000. Also, please fully fund the Farm To School & Early Childhood grant program at \$500,000.

I joined The Abbey Group during the onset of the pandemic and have seen how truly important it is to our small state that we support our local food systems. It became clear to all of us that the global food systems we so heavily rely on are not as stable as we once believed. The only way to fix this is by expanding and supporting local food systems. Not only does this keep our money local, but by doing so we are supporting the farmers who are struggling across our state.

The Farm to School & Early Childhood program helps schools create the infrastructure and partnerships necessary to bring fresh and local foods into our schools on a daily basis. By doing so, we have the amazing opportunity to minimize our environmental impact caused by food transportation and to reduce our reliance on large-scale factory farms. We can help pave the road that will connect Vermont farmers and their products to Vermont's children. Those kids then reap the benefits of experiencing delicious and nutritious local foods while building connections with their local communities by understanding where their food comes from.

By funding this program we are helping our schools succeed in accessing the recently adopted local purchasing incentive that encourages those schools to buy local products. These two programs can work synergistically. We at The Abbey Group pride ourselves on our commitment to working with local farmers and food producers and are beyond excited about this initiative and truly want to see it succeed. The Farm to School & Early Childhood program's support of the local purchasing incentive would further help all of Vermont's schools serve our students Vermont foods grown and produced by other Vermonters.

By fully funding these programs, we are investing in our children's futures as well as investing in our neighbors. Now is the time to act in their favor, for all of our sakes. We are counting on you to invest in them.

Again, I am imploring you today to support the governor's recommendation to fund the Local Purchasing Incentive Program at \$500,000. And to also please fully fund the Farm To School & Early Childhood grant program at \$500,000.

Thank you all so much for your time and consideration.