



6 February 2024

State of Vermont House Committee on Agriculture, Food Resiliency, and Forestry

Rep. David Durfee, Chair; Rep. Henry Pearl, Clerk; and Sydonia Axis Lary, Committee Assistant

State of Vermont Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Energy

Sen. Christopher Bray, Chair; Sen. Brian Campion, Clerk; Jude Newman, Committee Assistant

Dear Committee Members:

On behalf of John Graham Housing & Services (JGHS) and the individuals and families we serve, I am writing in support of S.286, a bill that proposes to provide that accessory on-farm businesses are not development that require a permit under Act 250.

JGHS has a mission to provide emergency shelter, affordable housing, and essential services to individuals and families without a home or facing housing instability. JGHS clients include families sheltered at the John Graham Shelter in Vergennes and affordable housing tenants living in six JGHS and other scattered sites across Addison County. We serve over 400 people annually and JGHS has the only emergency shelter in Addison County that shelters children and adults.

While the JGHS mission centers on shelter and housing, access to food is an essential component of our service delivery. JGHS relies on food provided via a) funding from Vermonters Feeding Vermonters and the Emergency Food Services Program (EFSP), b) collaboration with HOPE and other community partners, and c) Addison County farms that donate produce, meat, and dairy products. Additionally, we have an ongoing need for naturally processed frozen produce and meals that serve as whole-food options for JGHS households. The majority of JGHS shelter guests and affordable housing tenants are employed (some working more than one job) and prepared meals give JGHS families access to nutritious food when they come home from work.

I believe passage of S.286 will empower small farms to develop accessory on-farm businesses to expand access to nutritious food for unhoused, hungry, and homebound people in Vermont. One example is a collaboration of HOPE, the Gleaning Collective, and Little Village Acres in Middlebury. The Gleaning Collective collects extra produce; HOPE organizes volunteers to sort, pack, and clean produce; and Little Village Acres, with passage of S.286, will provide a kitchen to cook and freeze meals and soups that can be used in food shelves and homeless shelters. Without the Little Village Acres kitchen, this group can only use 50% of what is salvaged—a waste of food while people remain hungry.

I'm sure you are aware that the number of unhoused Vermonters has increased 137% since 2019 and those experiencing food scarcity has increased to 33% of our population over the same years (VCEH and VDH 2023). Please vote in favor of S.286, in support of our farms that are working to be part of the solution.

Thank you for reading this testimony and please let me know if I can provide any additional information.

Very sincerely,

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Executive Director

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