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FY 2024 Budget Adjustment Funding Priorities to Support Food Security

Prepared for the House Committee on Agriculture, Food Resiliency, and Forestry
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1/4/2024

Hunger Free Vermont respectfully submits this request for funding support for two specific measures we believe are critically needed to address the cascading hunger crises in our state, and ensure programs that prepare and deliver meals to our elders and people with disabilities get the long-term stability they need to operate. The combination of the loss of \$6.5 million a month in federal pandemic-era SNAP Emergency Allotments, combined with the summer flooding disaster and ongoing high food prices has placed a tremendous and unsustainable burden on the community organizations that provide food to those who need it. These community groups need the State's partnership now in order to continue meeting their communities' food needs.

Help Vermont's Charitable Food Network Mitigate the End of SNAP Emergency Allotments

Please fully fund the Vermont Foodbank's request for \$2 million in additional base funding in the Budget Adjustment process.

Vermont's network of 225+ food shelves and community meal sites and 25+ direct distribution sites are reporting increased need that is stretching their capacities to the limit. Food shelves are reporting that they are seeing a significant increase in working families with children using these charitable food resources, and overall increases in usage between 20% and 84%. The funding that the Foodbank is requesting is especially important because it is the lowest barrier to access to food for individuals and families who need it, and it specifically supports people in getting the fresh foods and staples they need every day. For the many who are not eligible for 3SquaresVT but whose income is still far below JFO's basic needs thresholds, the charitable food network is essential and currently pushed to the brink.

Increase Funding for Meal Programs Serving Older Vermonters and People with Disabilities

Please fully fund the Vermont Association of Area Agencies on Aging's request for \$2 million in additional base funding in the Budget Adjustment process to support Meals on Wheels and congregate meal programs statewide.

About 15% of older Vermonters are food insecure and do not get enough nutritious food to properly support their health and manage their medical conditions. Meals on Wheels programs throughout Vermont have experienced increased enrollment in the past two years, while the federal Older Americans Act has been level-funded for years. Meals on Wheels providers, along with senior centers and other organizations that operate congregate meal sites, are already struggling to meet the requests for the healthy meals they provide. This program supports especially vulnerable members of our communities, who were also particularly impacted by the summer flooding disaster, and meets their very specific nutrition needs with dignity and care.

Thank you for considering these funding priorities, which are key first steps on the road to achieving food security for everyone who lives in Vermont. Hunger Free Vermont understands that ending hunger in permanent and dignified ways requires funding multiple systems of support, like the Vermont Foodbank and Meals on Wheels, because food security means providing food and meals when and where people need them. We appreciate each member of this Committee for your efforts to ensure that all of us are able to meet our most basic needs, so that our communities and our state can thrive.