Good afternoon,

My name is Becky Arbella. I am the Director of SASH and Resident Services at Shires Housing in Bennington. We not only serve our residents in Bennington County, we also serve approximately 450 older Vermonters and people with disabilities in Bennington County and the Deerfield Valley of Windham County. I started with Shires Housing SASH in 2014. I was surprised and very naive in thinking everyone could afford food. Many older Vermonters shared with me that many times they would have to choose between food or medication because they could not afford both some weeks. This is unacceptable to me. It has been an 8-year driving force of trying to assist the VT Foodbank in fighting food insecurity in southern Vermont. We have partnered with the VT Foodbank since 2015. The Vermont Foodbank was instrumental in assisting us to set up a temporary food shelf at Mount Snow during the beginning of the pandemic. Many would not have had access to food without this food shelf at the time. In July of 2020, the VT Foodbank allowed us to set up a Veggie Van Go in Whitingham at the high school. This brought fresh produce and farm products to an area that is considered a food dessert. With Shires Housing staff, the foodbank helps feed about 200 families in that one area of Vermont. The VT Foodbank also makes it possible for Shires Housing SASH staff to distribute food at 5 other food distribution drops. In 2023 alone, the VT Foodbank donated 131,978 pounds of food for our staff to distribute. We all assumed that once we were emerging from the pandemic, the need for food would decrease. That is not the case. We are seeing increasingly higher, fuel, utilities and especially groceries. Food should never be a luxury saved for those who can afford it.

This is why I am urging you to support the VT Foodbanks 2024 base funding request of $5 million. Thank you for allowing me to testify on the VT Foodbank's behalf.

Becky Arbella
Shires Housing Community Specialist
SASH Implementation Manager
Deerfield Valley - Bennington County