



Teddy Waszazak
Legislative Policy Lead, Hunger Free Vermont
781-219-8770, twaszazak@hungerfreevt.org

Testimony in support of funding to establish the Restaurant Meals Program in Vermont:

Chair Wood, and Members of the House Human Services Committee -

Thank you for taking the time to hear our testimony today in support of a budget request related to the 3SquaresVT Restaurant Meals Program. Hunger Free Vermont requests that \$85,000 be included in the Committee's budget memo, for a "Restaurant Meals Program Navigator" to be housed within the Agency of Human Services.

The Restaurant Meals Program is a federal program which allows, by USDA's definitions, elderly, disabled, and homeless 3SquaresVT recipients to use their benefits at approved restaurants. This position would assist restaurants in navigating the bureaucratic approval process, provide direct technical assistance to restaurants in terms of setting up their Point of Sale systems to process the 3SquaresVT benefits, and work to develop eligibility criteria for participating restaurants.

We have been talking to restaurant owners who are excited about the prospect of this program, and eager to participate. Besides being a food security program, the Restaurant Meals Program will also provide economic stimulus to the approved/eligible restaurants that have had a very challenging few years in Vermont, due to both the COVID pandemic and the flooding of July 2023.

Additionally, the program allows 3SquaresVT recipients more options for how they access food; for a homeless recipient who may not have a safe way to cook or store food, or an elderly or disabled recipient who may not be able to cook at home or make regular trips to the grocery store, this program can help fill that gap.

Thank you, and please feel free to reach out with any questions or requests for additional testimony.

Teddy Waszazak