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### Testimony: February 28, 2023

Good evening. My name is Andrew Courtney. I work as the Director of Foodworks for Groundworks Collaborative in Brattleboro, Vermont. Foodworks is a network partner of the Vermont Foodbank.

Please address the ongoing needs of Vermonters facing food insecurity by establishing a base appropriation of \$3 million in the fiscal year 2024 state budget for the Vermont Foodbank.

Foodworks is designed as a neighborhood grocery store where anyone can access supplemental food resources. Over the past year, we have seen a dramatic increase in need from community members in Brattleboro. We have seen a 40% increase in visits over the past 9 months. In total, we estimate that over 4,000 unique individuals will access food through our program this year. Programs like ours are being hit with a double impact of inflation. We are seeing record utilization numbers in our program during a time when the cost of stocking our shelves is also higher than it has ever been. Our shoppers notice when we are forced to make decisions to stop stocking certain items due to cost, and it exacerbates concerns about their own food needs being met. The combination of no-cost and low-cost food we have access to through the VT Foodbank is the backstop that allows our program to meet the needs of our community. The VT Foodbank and its partners, like us at Groundworks Collaborative, have made substantial investment into programs that serve the basic food needs of individuals. We in turn, need the support of our leaders in government to continue this work.

It is unacceptable for any Vermonter to experience food insecurity. In coming weeks communities across Vermont will be facing the reality of the Everyone Eats program coming to a close at the same time as the reduction in 3Squares Vermont benefits is initiated. Meanwhile, prices of groceries are 11% higher than one year ago. Is now a good time for our state leaders to fail to acknowledge the need for access to food in our Vermont communities?

Please address the ongoing needs of Vermonters facing food insecurity by establishing a base appropriation of \$3 million in the FY24 state budget for the Vermont Foodbank.

Thank you.

**basic needs met with dignity**

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