

Hello, my name is Emily Ahtúnan from Montpelier. I am here before you today as someone deeply impacted by the vital services the Vermont Foodbank provides. I'm asking you to support the Foodbank's request for \$5 million in base funding to address the sustained, increased need for access to food in communities throughout Vermont. As a disabled Vermonter, my connection to this cause is rooted in the reality of relying on food assistance, weaving together resources like 3SquaresVT, Meals on Wheels through the Montpelier Meals Program, and weekly home deliveries from the Montpelier Food Pantry to sustain me through each week and month.

With the end of the pandemic EBT monthly benefit, there has been a drastic monthly decrease in my 3SquaresVT assistance. Consequently, my dependence on my local food pantry and Meals on Wheels has significantly increased. Previously receiving \$281.00 a month in pandemic 3SquaresVT allowed me to purchase healthy, month-long food supplies. Now, with a \$23.00/month 3Squares benefit, I rely on Meals on Wheels Monday-Friday and a weekly home delivery from the Montpelier Food Pantry. For context, it's noteworthy that Meals on Wheels costs me \$50.00/month out of pocket, almost twice my current 3SquareVT monthly benefit, underscoring the financial cost for 19 or 20 meals a month at \$2.50 per meal.

In addition to my food assistance challenges, I carry the financial burden of approximately \$250.00 a month for Medicare Parts B and D, VPharm, and prescription co-pays, not including my Medicare deductible and co-pays throughout the year. The strain extends further as I lack coverage for dental or medically necessary vision exams, adding an extra layer of financial difficulty in balancing healthcare and purchasing food.

As a recipient of food from the pantry, I've witnessed the impact of the Vermont Foodbank's commitment to ensuring that no Vermonter goes hungry. My struggles are not unique, as many in our communities are grappling with decreased EBT/SNAP allotments, leaving families and individuals with limited resources to put food on the table.

This personal experience has illuminated the critical role the Vermont Foodbank plays in supporting individuals like me during these challenging times. The \$5 million in base funding that the Foodbank requests is not just a number; it represents hope, sustenance, and a lifeline for those facing food insecurity.

I implore you to sympathize with the stories of individuals and families who have seen their EBT/SNAP allotments decrease drastically. The Vermont Foodbank's work is indispensable in bridging the gap and ensuring everyone has access to the necessary nourishment. Please support the Foodbank's request for \$5 million in base funding to address the sustained, increased need for access to food in communities throughout Vermont.

In terms of food shelf offerings, the most helpful items for me are pre-made meals, and non-perishable staples with a longer shelf life, such as canned goods, rice, pasta, and shelf-stable proteins. These items provide a foundation for creating balanced meals that can last throughout the month, allowing me to stretch my resources.

The support from the Vermont Foodbank and food pantry impacts both my health and overall well-being. Access to nutritious options ensures that I can maintain a balanced diet, crucial for managing my health conditions. This assistance not only addresses immediate hunger but contributes to my long-term health outcomes, helping me better navigate the challenges of being a disabled Vermonter.

I believe it's important for the committee to understand that accessing food through food shelves is a multifaceted experience. While it provides a lifeline for those facing financial constraints, it also comes with its own set of challenges. Navigating the systems, coordinating schedules for deliveries or pickups, and adjusting to available food options can be complex. However, the support from organizations like the Vermont Foodbank is invaluable. It goes beyond merely obtaining food from a store; it symbolizes community care, compassion, and a lifeline for those of us navigating the intricate balance of health, disability, and financial strain.

I appreciate the variety of options provided and understanding the constraints and variations in available resources. Your support not only ensures our basic needs are met but also acknowledges the dignity and worth of every individual facing these challenges.

I hope the committee recognizes the significance of their decision in shaping the well-being of Vermonters like myself who rely on these essential services and chooses to support the Foodbank's request for \$5 million in base funding to address the sustained, increased need for access to food in communities throughout Vermont.

Thank you again for your time and consideration.