

Senate Health and Welfare Committee
Senate Bill S. 215

My name is George Schenk. I am the founder and CEO of American Flatbread at Lareau Farm and Forest in Waitsfield. We have had a Flatbread restaurant at this location since 1992.

Since 1993 I have donated monthly pizza parties at the UVM Medical Center Children's Hospital. For 18 years I served on the Board of the Vermont Foodbank and served on the Board of VBSR for 6 years. We have an ongoing program of making free Flatbread and garden produce available for the ill, injured and those in recovery. During Covid we made special donations of Flatbread to local food shelves.

For a short period of my life back in the late 1970's I personally experienced food insecurity. I am grateful I do not now.

Hunger is surprisingly common in the United States, and Vermont is no exception. The singular cause of hunger in this country is poverty. The depredations of poverty ripple through people's souls and abraid the fabric of their families. Hunger is often an invisible burden carried in silence out of shame or sense of failure. But poverty is rarely a personal failure - a failure to care for one's self or family. More often it is brought on by circumstances beyond the individual's control: illness, injury, divorce, job loss, and age - the poverty of children is no fault of their own and the elderly are often no longer able to work.

With established kitchen infrastructure and food expertise the restaurant industry is well poised to help feed people who have long been excluded and let them experience the uplifting joys of good food in a warm and nurturing setting. The proposed Senate Bill S.215 would do this, and strengthen an important sector of our economy that has been battered by the Covid pandemic and substantial economic pressures in the cost of food, labor, and real estate.

I believe S.215 will make Vermont a better, more equitable, more just society for all.

Thank you.

Respectfully,

George Schenk,

Founder and CEO, American Flatbread at Lareau Farm and Forest, Waitsfield, Vt.