

Public Budget Hearing Testimony

John Sayles, CEO, Vermont Foodbank

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My name is John Sayles; I am CEO at the Vermont Foodbank and live in Montpelier. When the State of Vermont steps into leadership for food security, our collective action will be successful. Vermont Foodbank is seeking a total of \$5 million in state FY27 for 3 purposes:

1. \$2 million to fully fund the Vermonters Feeding Vermonters grant program at the AAFM,
2. \$2 million to fund food and services going directly to local food shelves and meal sites across the state, and
3. \$1 million to fund Responsive Readiness to ensure food and water is available during natural and man-made disasters and emergencies.

Vermonters Feeding Vermonters uses state grant funds to purchase Vermont grown and raised foods that are distributed through food shelves and meal sites and in Foodbank direct distribution programs like VeggieVanGo. The full \$2 million will allow purchases for hundreds of Vermont farms and distribution to tens of thousands of our neighbors.

Funding directed to local food shelves and meal sites supports food purchases and distribution costs so that the flow of food can continue at existing levels. Neighbors are visiting more frequently and seeking more food on each visit. This funding gives Vermont families some needed stability in precarious times.

Finally, through Ready Response the Foodbank seeks to formalize a relationship with VEM to ensure that VF and our community partners are prepared and resourced to address acute needs for food and water when an emergency or disaster occurs. The Foodbank and local partners have a unique role to play, which requires coordination and sustained funding.

Thank you for your consideration. In a time of many difficult choices, basic human needs must not get lost, and the State of Vermont can make policy choices that will ensure food security for everyone who lives here.