

Testimony in support of the Restaurant Meals Program for Hunger Free Vermont.

February 6th 2025

Hello,

My name is Tobin Porter-Brown. I live in Craftsbury VT, and I am the owner of Front Seat Coffee in Hardwick. Front Seat Coffee was founded in the summer of 2019, eight months later we had to mostly shut down because of Covid. however, with the support of the Vermont Everyone Eats program we have been able to persist and have now seen our business continue to thrive. Through this program, we participated in both the Community Meals that were administered with through the Center for Agricultural Economy, as well as the Localvore programs. This experience of working with the VEE gave us a lot of excitement and enthusiasm to support the Restaurant Meals Program that is being proposed today.

Our experience with VEE is that it was a huge success. It not only kept Front Seat Coffee alive through the darkest times of the pandemic, but it was a huge community builder that benefited people that were food insecure, many of which are now current customers.

The restaurant industry is notoriously difficult and sees multiple headwinds currently with variable ingredient costs, increasing labor costs, and very slim margins. The restaurant meals program would be a financial benefit to this struggling industry.

One of the other surprising benefits of giving out these meals is that it was a huge community builder. The appreciation and joy that people have in receiving these meals, ingratiated us with a lot of goodwill. That appreciation and goodwill has made Front Seat Coffee a vital community hub for Hardwick. We found that many of these meal recipients eventually became regular customers.

My experience with working with the VEE program gives me a lot of confidence that the Restaurant Meals Program would be a win-win program that would be a huge benefit to our state.

Sincerely,

Tobin Porter-Brown,

Owner of Front Seat Coffee