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First, thank you for your time today and for approving last year's appropriation of \$150,000. That funding was critical in stabilizing our program during a year where we faced a \$41,000 administrative shortfall—a gap we typically cover through other grants. Your support lifted a significant financial burden, allowing funds that would have subsidized CACFP to instead strengthen direct service programs.

Without that appropriation, we would have faced difficult decisions about continuing to sponsor the CACFP—a move that would have devastated not only the DCH providers, but also the children and families they serve. Many operators have stated that without CACFP, they would either close their programs or require families to provide food for their children, creating an unimaginable burden for families already under financial strain. Keeping CACFP sponsors in Vermont is essential to combating hunger and supporting vulnerable communities.

The Need for Continued Support

While last year's appropriation was a lifeline, more work remains. Increased administrative funding will allow CACFP sponsors to **expand capacity, improve provider support, and boost participation statewide.**

1. Enhanced Operational Capacity

- **Staffing:** Adequate funding enables sponsors to hire staff dedicated to recruitment and compliance. Currently, two of Vermont's three remaining sponsors operate with just one staff member, and the third covers nine counties with only two staff members. This leaves little time for outreach and recruitment, which are vital for program growth.
- **Expansion & Outreach:** With more resources, sponsors can actively conduct outreach, recruitment, and training activities to expand participation in low-income or rural areas, ensuring more eligible providers and children benefit from the CACFP.
- **Program Expansion:** Less than 40 % of Vermont's early childhood providers currently utilize CACFP, meaning hundreds of eligible sites remain unsupported. Increasing administrative funding will enable targeted outreach to bridge this gap and expand service coverage.

2. Better Provider Support & Compliance

- By improving funding levels, we can help providers not only meet increased nutritional standards—such as greater variety of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains that have been required since 2017—but also benefit from training and faster reimbursement processes that sustain financial viability.

3. Increased Participation and Access

- **Reduced Barriers:** Streamlined processes and enhanced support lower administrative hurdles that discourage participation.
- **Sustainable Programs:** Better funding makes CACFP financially viable for family childcare homes and centers, improving retention and stability.
- **Greater Food Security:** More funding means more children from low-income families receive nutritious meals, improving health and well-being. Families with children are 5 times more likely to experience food insecurity and participation in the CACFP has been shown to improve household food security and increase children's consumption of dairy and vegetables.