

TESTIMONY TO: House Government Operations & Military Affairs

FROM: Denise Walton, Concord resident and volunteer

RE: 3SquaresVT Awareness Day

DATE: February 5, 2026

I thank you for allowing me to speak today.

I am Denise Walton. I'm here today as a resident and community member of Concord Vt. Also an advocate for our local food pantry, Sid's Pantry, which is housed at the Concord Health Center, run by Northern Counties Health Care. Sid's Pantry serves approx 60 families of all ages. A monthly pantry is held along with past offerings of an additional veggie drop, and Lunch served pop-up style in the summer. ALL of these projects have been made possible with VERMONT food Bank programs and or grants and the MANY volunteers who gave their time.

And I am here today to ask you to fully fund Vermont Foodbank's request for \$5 million in FY27 with \$2 million for the Vermonters Feeding Vermonters grant program, \$2 million to support Vermont Foodbank network food shelves and meal sites, \$1 million for Ready Response food access in emergencies.

In my community, we have a population of almost 30% 65 and over, most live alone and have limited local family. We are a very RURAL area with no PUBLIC transportation and a very small convenience market, but NO grocery stores unless one travels to New Hampshire or St. Johnsbury. The current population is approximately 1669 people, with 16.9% living at the poverty level.

It is a perfect community partnership for Sid's Pantry to be located at the Concord Health Center. Food access is AVAILABLE during health centers' open hours and patients/residents of ESSEX county get a referral to the pantry. Produce, which is ALWAYS of the highest quality, comes from Vermont Foodbank in the monthly pantry drop off and is SUPPLEMENTED with Vermonters Feeding Vermonters grant, which is used to purchase fresh food from local farmers. We buy Eggs, fresh milk, and seasonal veggies and fruit from our local farms. Our community can help support the local farms, while they eat fresh, healthy foods. Healthy lunches during the summer were featured with local fresh veggies, lots of protein...utilizing canned tuna, chicken, eggs, and cheese; all supplied by Vermont Foodbank from our monthly deliveries.

Each month the shelves are well stocked with staples, pasta, rice, cereal, canned goods, fresh fruits and ALWAYS apple sauce. These are ordered and paid for through various grants.

Our community is VERY generous during the year with a BIG food drive at the Concord School, Miles Pond Association donates at the end of summer, as they head out and empty their camps, the Health Center sponsors a turkey trot on Thanksgiving morning for fun, and collects canned goods and donations. Groups bake bread at local churches to add to holiday baskets.

This is ALL part of our community and part of many communities within our State. We are proud, we are humble, and in our current status..we are in NEED...we ask that you PLEASE consider funding the Foodbank's budget request.

Lastly, I will talk about Ready Response ...for floods, ice storms, and emergencies. I myself experienced one of these emergencies on NOVEMBER 1st of 2025. With the government shut down..there were no EBT benefits paid out to anyone. As an elderly, disabled person, I qualify for EBT ...with the tiny window of prior knowledge and preparedness, i was able to grow sprouts from beans,make soups and made do.

The store was vacant, as I entered to get my 2-item list, I saw the shelves piled HIGH with things I could not have: fresh veggies were wilting as there was no one to buy them; the meat dept bulged with its load. THAT feeling, t ignited me. I made do, but the families, the kids, our elders, and our veterans, our neighbors all over our state - what if they couldn't? In response to this federal emergency, one week later, Vermont stepped up and helped its people so we wouldn't have to make do; elders could have more than crackers and tea, kids could go to bed with a nice full tummy.

Thank you for the action you took as legislators to ensure that those of us who needed help in November got money to buy groceries and food shelves got help to keep the shelves stocked. That support was critical. That showed people like me that you also believe that poor folks don't deserve to or have to suffer. And we deserve to ask for and have choices of fresh healthy foods and safe adequate programs to access these foods.

I recently was surprised to learn that each month the Vermont Foodbank and our partners serve an estimated 70,000 people across VT....with 14 million pounds of food delivered, 222 farms are supported by Vermont Foodbank, and 217 Network Partners shared food with neighbors. With a current population of close to 648,000 in our state that number of estimated people that are utilizing food access services.

In closing, it is with gratitude that I am here today and ask you to please consider FULL funding for FY27 For the HEALTHY well-being of the residents of our communities of Vermont. Thank you.