

Eva Schectman 3SquaresVT Day 2025 Testimony

Thank you for having me here today. My name is Eva Schectman. I am a low-income self-employed resident of Montpelier, and I have been serving on the board of Just Basics, Inc. (JBI), the organization that runs the Montpelier Food Pantry, since 2019. I am here to ask you to support Vermont Foodbank's \$5 million request in the FY26 budget, and specifically \$1.75 million in base funding for Responsive Readiness, to ensure the Vermont Foodbank and partners are prepared when disasters strike Vermont communities, as well as \$3.25 million to purchase and distribute food, and support the network of community-based meal sites and food shelves like the Montpelier Food Pantry.

In July 2023 the Montpelier Food Pantry, located in the basement of the Trinity Methodist Church on Main St. in Montpelier, was flooded up to the rafters. Everything we had in the basement was gone, (food, refrigerators and freezers, shelving, office equipment and computers, you name it).

I joined the crew of over 50 people who volunteered to muck out that basement after the flood waters had receded. We knew we wouldn't be able to return to that location and immediately found ways to continue serving the community. That first week or two, we gathered, among other necessary things, coolers from community members and set up under tents at the volunteer hub on Main St, on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturdays from 10am-12pm, the same days of the week and hours of the day the pantry was open in the church basement. Every day staff (all four of them!), board members and a bunch of dedicated and new volunteers set up and packed up afterwards the coolers for perishable/cold/frozen foods and boxes for non-perishables. Community Harvest of Central Vermont graciously stored perishable food at their facility about 5 miles outside of town until we were ready to set up shop again where we could store these foodstuffs ourselves. We then moved indoors to a classroom at the Center for Arts and Learning on Barre St for a month or so, which was great for access (and out of the weather), but again, no storage and everything had to be set up and packed away every day. After a month or so serving the community there, we moved to our current location (not ideal for a number of reasons but more accessible than the church basement and in a central location in town), in the City Center building, accessed on East State St. in Montpelier.

Every step of the way the Food Bank did what they could to support our efforts. We knew, even before the 2024 flood, the high likelihood of more frequent flooding. As communities across the state know, we need to be ready to respond to the next flood before it hits. The Food Bank needs your support to help make that possible.

I cannot emphasize enough how vitally important it will be to have this committee's support to approve the Food Bank's \$5 million budget request: \$1.75 million in base funding for

Responsive Readiness and \$3.25 million to purchase and distribute food across the state.

Thank you again for having me here today, I appreciate your time.

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