

To House Government Operations & Military Affairs

From Stella James, Harwick Area Food Pantries

RE: 3SquaresVT Awareness Day

Feb. 5, 2026

Hi everyone,

Thank you for having me. My name is Stella James. I live in West Danville, Vermont. I'm the executive director of the Hardwick Area Food Pantries.

I am here to Support Vermont Foodbank's request for a \$5 million total appropriation in FY27, including \$2 million to support their network of partners, \$2 million for the Vermonters Feeding Vermonters local food purchasing program, and \$1 million for Ready Response to ensure food access in disasters and emergencies.

Day in and day out, our sites protect people undergoing personal emergencies and when floods come, these personal emergencies aren't put on hold, they are compounded. All in bound and out bound roads are flooded in Hardwick, trapping only a specialty grocer and our food pantry, as we learned in both floods of '23 and '24. And when these floods receded, there were more than damaged roads and homes that needed rebuilding. The SNAP freeze of 2024, much like the years of flooding, created unprecedented urgency for our operations. We braced for impact without any knowledge of what was coming. We had 48 hours to procure, receive, and store enough food for an emergency we'd never seen before. No one grows accustomed to the stress of survival. My visitors were deeply concerned. Though the Food Bank and our community supported us, we could not continue the demand. Food disappeared from our shelves at alarming rates. Accidents, injuries, illness, job loss, and all our usual problems never ceased. It's too much to ask of private donors, donated food, and elderly volunteers. We need well-laid plans, equipment, a backup generator, and funds to purchase and store food for emergencies. We are disaster relief for our visitors every day. We need additional funding to weather the next emergency.

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Thank you for generously listening to my testimony. Are there any questions?

