

Thank you for the opportunity to share my experience with you.

My name is Julia Burgess and I work as a SASH Coordinator in Central Vermont. For those of you unfamiliar with the program, SASH stands for Support and Services at Home. We are a free health and wellness program to individuals who receive Medicare. I am here today to talk about the impact that the 3SquaresVT benefit has had on the individuals I serve. Many SASH participants struggle to make ends meet and make sure they have good nutritious foods. Due to the rising costs in our country, many individuals I work with struggle to have fresh fruits and vegetables because the cost is prohibitive. Many older Vermonters are having to choose between food and medication, heat and electricity, and it is only getting harder for them.

I work with a SASH Participant, we call them SPs for short, who is in her late 80s and had been having increasing needs for nutritious foods due to rising A1C levels. I met with her and we discussed her diet which consisted mostly of frozen banquet meals because that is what she could afford. She told me that she didn't have much money for food and the frozen meals are only \$1.25 each. Together we applied for the 3SQUARESVT benefit. She was approved and was able to purchase healthier foods. As a result, her A1C has reduced several points and she is on track to improve her health.

I am here today to ask that you support the passage of legislation to instruct the State to opt into the 3SquaresVT Restaurant Meals Program, appropriate \$75,000 to cover restaurant startup costs, and \$100,000 to create a staff position within DCF to administer the program. Based on my work with SASH Participants across Central Vermont, I can safely say that having this support will make a huge impact on the more vulnerable in our state. Many individuals I serve are unable to stand long enough to make meals. A program like 3SquaresVT Restaurant Meals would help those individuals have access to warm, healthy meals.

I also ask that you support NOFA-VT's request for \$500,000 in base funding to Strengthen Vermont Farm Viability and Address Food Security by sustaining two proven programs: Crop Cash (Plus) and Farm Share. I have been involved with NOFA-VT's Senior Farm Share Program for four summers. This program helps to address the need for nutritious, fresh veggies for older Vermonters. I have seen firsthand the impact this program has had on older Vermonters. They are always thankful to receive fresh vegetables. Further, this program supports Vermont's small farms.

Thank you for your time,

Julia A. Burgess, SASH Coordinator (Montpelier, Cabot, Waterbury, Waitsfield, and Warren)

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