



10/30/2025

Testimony of Liz Scharf, Capstone Community Action

House Committee on Human Services

My name is Liz Scharf and I am the Director of Community Economic Development and Food Security at Capstone Community Action in Barre VT. I am a resident of Middlesex.

Last Friday, 10/24/25, I worked at Capstone's food shelf—the largest food shelf serving central Vermonters. As October is the beginning of our new fiscal year, we spend a little extra time with each visitor ensuring that they have updated their applications with any changes to their addresses, family members, or income. On Friday, there were 50 families visiting the shelf between 9:00 and noon.

I met one older gentleman who was a Veteran who also received 3-Squares. He expressed deep concern that not only would he not receive his 3-Squares, but that his VA benefit was not going to be deposited to his account in November because of the federal government shutdown. He said, »I'm.afraid.I'm.going.to.become.homeless.and.lose.my.apartment.because.I.won't.be.able.to.pay.my.rent.without.my.VA.benefit« .

Many people were anxious about the real possibility that their SNAP benefit will be withheld on November 1st when they would normally be deposited onto their EBT card or in their bank account. **One woman said her health requires a special diet that she can't find at a food pantry and she relies on her SNAP benefit to help pay for the special food. Her seizure medication must be taken with three meals a day, and if she skips a meal, that affects how her body reacts to the medication.** Another young mom said that she can't afford the glucose pills to reduce her blood sugar, so she uses her SNAP benefits to buy snacks and oranges to help her monitor her blood sugar. Yet another single mother remembers a time when she didn't have enough food in the house and would skip meals and her children would ask her why she wasn't eating and she would say she "wasn't hungry". She distinctly remembers when her kids got to a certain age they knew that wasn't the case and that their mom was sacrificing food so that they would have enough to eat.

The atmosphere in the lobby as people waited their turn was one of fear and uncertainty. When asked by patrons if the rumors were true that the State would cover the SNAP benefit, I could only tell them what I had read in the news—"Maybe, but it might not be on November 1st".

In central Vermont, just over 10% of families receive SNAP benefits. In Barre City, where Capstone's food shelf is located, that number jumps to 26%. More than a quarter of Barre City Residents rely on SNAP to help them pay for food for their families. For most families,

the benefit is not quite enough. While they likely use some of their own dollars to fill the gap, they also use Capstone's Food Shelf which patrons may visit twice per month for a big shopping trip, and every week for vegetables and bread. Last year our data reflected over 1500 families who made over 8600 visits to our food pantry, and that did not include the days they come in for bread and vegetables.

Community Action Agencies rely on federal funding to administer programs from Head Start to Weatherization, and the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) is the foundational funding for Community Action Agencies nationwide that defines how we conduct business—from the structure of our Board of Directors to our data management and accountability. *Right now, all of these funding sources are at risk, and the shutdown is forcing us to make daily decisions about how to prioritize our efforts during a time of significant uncertainty.* CSBG helps fund our Food Shelf operations, and at a moment when we are likely to see an increase in visits in just a few days, we are concerned about our ability to fill the gap during the shutdown. Capstone's food shelf budget does not include a contingency for a pause in SNAP benefits and the charitable food community will never be adequate to replace the food choices or the quantities that approximately 12.5 million dollars in SNAP dollars bring to Vermont each month.

Capstone is fiscally strong and has weathered many uncertainties over the past 60 years. Yet this shutdown is different, and we are left with a lot of unanswered questions as we wait for guidance from our state and federal officials. Social Service agencies like the community action agencies are skilled at advocating for and supporting vulnerable community members—the unhoused, the folks who can't cover the full cost of food and fuel to heat their homes, the families who rely on Head Start to support their growing families, the people whose old Vermont homes need weatherizing to cut down on heat loss and to reduce their fuel bills. It's what we do extraordinarily well. But, at a time when federal dollars are not only held back from our programming, but also from the people who need it the most in the form of SNAP, we need swift response from our state to address this crisis.

Thank you for advocating for Vermonters and for your service to the State of Vermont.

Sincerely,

Liz Scharf
Director of Community Economic Development and Food Security
Capstone Community Action
20 Gable Place|Barre, VT 05641
802-477-5215| lscharf@capstonevt.org