

FY2026 Budget Testimony submitted by Allan Reetz, Dir. Public & Govt. Affairs
Hanover Consumer Cooperative Society
224 Holiday Drive, White River Jct., Vermont
802-765-2871 – areetz@coopfoodstore.com

His sign read, “I need food.” I saw him in the parking lot of Hunger Mountain Co-op. It was late morning, February 6 at around 11:00. I had just finished testifying before Vermont legislators to request support for the SNAP Restaurant Meals Program and was stopping at the co-op to grab a sandwich before heading back to my office in White River Junction. There he stood, motionless.

The biting February winds coming out of Canada had most people bundled up for yet another brutally cold, snowy day. I, for one, had a quick stride as I made my way to the Statehouse and back, all the while bracing myself until I returned to warm shelter.

He stood alone in old barn boots, work coat, hat, and worn-out gloves that had seen many hours of labor. The snow around his feet proved he’d been there awhile.

Stepping out of my warm car, I paused to imagine his plight. What might have brought him to this point? Was he in a temporary bind, or under a relentless cascade of compounding circumstances?

“I need food.” It is such a stark plea.

Temporary bind, compounding circumstances, or even debilitating Arctic winds did not matter. The need for food was his sole focus for survival.

Again, I thought of that morning’s testimony and the earnest work of those fighting hunger. He was hoping for the food we’d been talking about just a mile away. The solutions like those from Hunger Free Vermont and Vermont Food Bank represent one part of his simple hope.

Finishing my shopping at the co-op, I scurried back to my car. As I left the parking lot, I pulled up to that fellow soul to hand him a sandwich, drink and chips. I said, “Lunch on me.” He slowly stepped forward and mustered strength to say, “Thank you.”

As I drove away, I wished I had thought to offer him a bowl of soup to help warm him at least for a few minutes. Despite how cold I felt, there is no way I could comprehend just how cold he must have been...not just that morning, but all winter.

The Restaurant Meals Program is that bowl of soup. It is a table to sit at and eat, a meal to take away, a dignified sample of the warmth and caring of others.

I urge your support for the Restaurant Meals Program and the supplemental nutrition requests before you this legislative session.

The eyes of the hungry may not see us working on solutions, but when we reach out a hand, their thanks will go beyond the words we hear.

Respectfully submitted,

Allan Reetz