



**Testimony of Autumn Moen, Burlington**  
**Legislative Policy Lead, Hunger Free Vermont**  
[amoen@hungerfreevt.org](mailto:amoen@hungerfreevt.org)  
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Chairs and members of the committees, my name is Autumn Moen, and I am the Legislative Policy Lead at Hunger Free Vermont. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of legislation that will instruct the State to opt into the SNAP Restaurant Meals Program and allocate necessary funding to ensure its successful implementation. Specifically, H. 151 and S. 42 request:

- \$100,000 for a dedicated staff position within the Department for Children and Families (DCF) to administer the program, and
- A fund of \$75,000 to support restaurants' costs when enrolling, including changes to Point of Sale machines or software to accept SNAP benefits.

The Vermont Department for Children and Families (DCF) administers the state's 3SquaresVT program, which is Vermont's name for the federal SNAP program. While a federal nutrition program, states have options to tailor SNAP to the needs of the state. The Restaurant Meals Program is one such option that states can elect to provide an additional way for select households to spend their benefits.

The Restaurant Meals Program allows older adults, people with disabilities, and those experiencing homelessness to use their federally-funded 3SquaresVT benefits to purchase hot meals at authorized restaurants. These populations often face significant barriers to accessing, storing, and preparing food, and ultimately using their 3SquaresVT benefits at all. By expanding 3SquaresVT benefits to include restaurants, we can ensure these vulnerable populations have access to the food they need.

Nine states have already implemented the Restaurant Meals Program, and their experiences underscore a critical lesson: Without dedicated funding and staff, the program struggles to function effectively. States that failed to allocate sufficient resources have seen limited participation and poor implementation, ultimately undermining the program's potential impact.

Vermont has the opportunity to adopt policies that ensure every resident has reliable access to the food they need, where they need it. A well-funded Restaurant Meals Program will uphold the dignity of choice that 3SquaresVT is designed to provide. However, without proper investment, we risk setting up a program that lacks the capacity to truly serve those who need it most.

I urge you to support this funding to ensure Vermont implements a high-quality program that makes a real difference for older, disabled, and homeless Vermonters enrolled in 3SquaresVT. Thank you for your time and consideration.