

Emmanuelle Soumeilhan  
Budget Public Hearing testimony 2/13/25  
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**Good afternoon. Thank you for your time.**

**My name is Emmanuelle Soumeilhan – I am the Food and Nutrition Program Coordinator at Capstone Community Action in Barre. Our food pantry serves Lamoille, Orange and Washington counties. I also volunteer overnight shifts at the Unitarian Church emergency shelter in Montpelier where I live.**

**I am here today to ask you to please appropriate \$5 million for The Vermont Foodbank - for responsive readiness, for food purchase and distribution and to support network capacity for the 220+ network partners food shelves and meal sites across the state.**

**During the last week of January, our pantry was empty, so was our walk-in cooler and we ran out of frozen meat. It was difficult to see people leaving with just some canned food knowing that their 3SquaresVT benefits were also gone.**

**This January, we regularly ran low on staple foods. That is after having ordered 8,694 pounds of food. This figure does not include the meat we receive from the food bank nor the vegetable they provide us with, completely free. Me and the twenty-five regular volunteers at Capstone's Food Pantry served a total of 477 unique families and received 754 visits. We processed 109 new and renewed applications, and forty-nine of these applicants had never been in the Foodshelf before. Comparatively, in January of 2024, 396 unique families were served, 596 visits occurred, 101 new and renewed applications were processed and 30 were completely new to our shelf. There were therefore nineteen new applications just in January of 2025. A 61.22% increase in completely new applicants in January 2024 and January 2025.**

**I am really concerned for our neighbors who work, are retired, and have disabilities. They are not able to sustain themselves because of lack of sufficient income. They no longer can buy eggs or fruits and vegetables and cannot afford even lower cost proteins like chicken.**

**As recently as 2 weeks ago I spent almost \$900, wholesale, on 5 cases of eggs. My budget has decreased by a third since last year. I have had to cut back on the amount eggs I can purchase. I am now only able to afford just two cases a week in addition to the 5 cases the food bank gives us at no cost every two weeks. With a smaller budget and more people to feed, the pantry shelves start to empty in less than 2 weeks.**

**This Monday, February 10, 2025, a middle-aged worker came to visit our pantry all the way from South Royalton. He was here for the first time in 5 years. He explained to me that he was injured at his work, he is currently awaiting surgery to repair his heel. He is not receiving workers' compensation yet because of delays in the system that are lasting more than 60 days. He was hungry and had to use a support walker with wheels to move around.**

**Last week, I welcomed yet another new neighbor. This time, a retired older Vermonter who cannot sustain herself with her social security check of just \$1,200 per month. She had no idea that 3SquaresVT was available to help with her food needs. I recommended her to call**

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**the 3squaresVT team at the foodbank to get counseled and get help signing up for this vital income source for food purchases.**

**One amazing family I had not visited the food shelf for nearly 8 months because the mother, a nurse, on top of working as a public nurse during the weekdays, was also working a second job at the Mental Health Hospital in Berlin. Now that the hospital has closed, she lost her second job but still has 6 children to feed. She and her husband are now coming back to me weekly to help with feeding her family with good healthy vegetables and proteins.**

**The Vermont Foodbank helps Capstone have food to share with our neighbors. Without the Vermont Foodbank, we could not do this work and share these resources with people who need them.**

**What I want you to remember most of all, through our food shelf, the food and services the Foodbank provides us with a sense of security. If our neighbors can get one more week, day or month of food at the Capstone Food Pantry, they are relieved of the stress of uncertainty of not knowing when their next meal might be.**

**This is why I am asking you to Please appropriate \$5 million for Vermont Foodbank - for responsive readiness, for food purchase and distribution and to support network capacity for our 220+ network partners food shelves and meal sites across the state.**

**Thank you for listening to me today. If we work together, we can ensure that all people in Vermont have food security.**