

FY2026 Budget: Vermont House and Senate Committees on Appropriations Public Budget Hearings

2/20/2025 Testimony by Sarah Keblin, Vermont Foodbank (hometown of Huntington, VT)

skeblin@vtfoodbank.org

Hello, my name is Sarah Keblin. I am a staff member at Vermont Foodbank and live in Huntington. I ask the legislature to appropriate \$5M for Vermont Foodbank—for responsive readiness and to support food purchase and distribution and our 220+ network partner food shelves and meal sites.

Testimony of by many people representing amazing resources and organizations in our state over the last two weeks reinforces the many challenges individuals and households are facing. Hunger, and lack of access to the food we need, is a symptom of many of those challenges.

Vermont Foodbank and its more than 220 food shelf and meal site partners have seen increased need for food help over the last two years. Vermont Foodbank operations are at about 25% above planned levels—we had hoped that need would recover after the pandemic, but inflation, costs of everyday goods, flooding and other economic stressors put untenable pressure on household budgets. Many people here in Vermont are having to make impossible choices---to buy medicine, heat homes or buy food. Food shelf partners report anywhere from 20-to more than 110% increases in visitors over the last year. Vermont Foodbank is distributing nearly twice as much food as it did in 2, and this is still not enough.

We've found that ongoing weather disasters add urgency to our basic operations—we know we need to remain strong and responsive as these events are no longer 100 year events.

We are asking the legislature to ensure Vermont Foodbank and its partners can continue to do this vital work, helping to provide the most basic need to tens of thousands of people across Vermont each month.

Again, please appropriate \$5M to Vermont Foodbank, to strengthen our responsive readiness and to support food purchase and distribution and support for our 220+ network partner food shelves and meal sites across the state.