

TO: VERMONT JOINT APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

FROM: Stella James, Hardwick Area Food Pantries

RE: VERMONT FOODBANK FY27 BUDGET REQUEST - \$1 million Ready Response

DATE: 2/19/2026

Thank you for the opportunity to share. My name is Stella James. I live in West Danville, Vermont. I'm the executive director of the Hardwick Area Food Pantries.

I am here to Support Vermont Foodbank's request for a \$5 million total appropriation in FY27, including \$1 million for Ready Response to ensure food access in disasters and emergencies.

Day in and day out, our sites protect people undergoing personal emergencies and when floods come, these personal emergencies aren't put on hold, they are compounded. All in bound and out bound roads are flooded in Hardwick, trapping only a specialty grocer and our food pantry, as we learned in both floods of '23 and '24. And when these floods receded, there were more than damaged roads and homes that needed rebuilding. The SNAP freeze of 2024, much like the years of flooding, created unprecedented urgency for our operations. We braced for impact without any knowledge of what was coming. We had 48 hours to procure, receive, and store enough food for an emergency we'd never seen before. No one grows accustomed to the stress of survival. My visitors were deeply concerned. Though the Food Bank and our community supported us, we could not continue the demand. Food disappeared from our shelves at alarming rates. Accidents, injuries, illness, job loss, and all our usual problems never ceased. It's too much to ask of private donors, donated food, and elderly volunteers. We need well-laid plans, equipment, a backup generator, and funds to purchase and store food for emergencies. We are disaster relief for our visitors every day. We need additional funding to weather the next emergency.

Please, support Vermont Foodbank's request for a \$5 million total appropriation in FY27, including \$1 million for Ready Response to ensure food access in disasters and emergencies.

Thank you for generously reading my testimony.