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February 5, 2026: 3SquaresVT Awareness Day

Senate Government Operations

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Thank you Chair and committee members for your time. My name is Ivy Enoch, and I live in Burlington. I am the Director of Policy and Advocacy at Hunger Free Vermont, and I'm here today with partners and neighbors for 3SquaresVT Awareness Day to acknowledge this essential program and to ask for your support on requests that, together, will ensure the best outcomes for our communities, farmers, and economy.

3SquaresVT is known nationally as SNAP, but in many households it's known as a lifeline. Nearly 10% of Vermonters receive 3SquaresVT, which is a monthly boost to grocery budgets. Put simply, 3SquaresVT makes it easier for lower-income and working class folks to buy the basics: milk, bread, produce, eggs, and more. It is the most effective and efficient food security program in the country—as well as a powerful economic development program.

With an approved application, people can shop with 3SquaresVT using an EBT card which looks and works just like a debit card. A trip to the grocery store is just like any other shopper's experience, which is very much by design. There are more than 600 retailers in Vermont who accept 3SquaresVT, including more than 40 farmers markets.

More than \$12 million in federal benefits are issued directly to participants each month. In November 2025 when we saw a historic and devastating lapse in federal funding for SNAP benefits, not only were 64,000 Vermonters stressed and worried about how they would pay for groceries, but our local businesses were stressed about filling a \$12 million gap in their bottom lines that month. Vermont's heroic effort to use state funds to issue partial benefits was a relief to families and grocers alike, and proved to be a wise investment in the safety and health of our communities.

While 3SquaresVT effectively reaches the most low-income folks, many more qualify. There are various reasons for this discrepancy, including additional eligibility requirements, and a complex application. Accessing 3SquaresVT was made more challenging in October 2025 when federal changes to SNAP included in H.R.1 went into effect.

In addition to federal eligibility changes, H.R.1 made changes to the funding structure of SNAP. Vermont faces additional costs to administer 3SquaresVT beginning in October 2026 because the federal government is pulling back their share of the administration cost. Hunger Free Vermont has been closely following the state's projections regarding increased administrative costs resulting from reduced federal funding. We are glad that

the Administration included funding for this, and urge the Legislature to continue to pay close attention to full funding needed to make sure we keep this critical food security and economic development program thriving in our state.

3SquaresVT helps people afford the basics so they can keep gas in the car to get to work, pay for childcare, pay the rent. When people lose eligibility—whether because they no longer qualify, or because of complex reporting rules, it harms the health and economic strength of our communities. This is one of the many reasons why having trained and trusted benefits assisters at organizations across Vermont is so important—these are people who understand the complex rules and processes and help people apply for 3SquaresVT and other federal programs.

We have a strong network of benefit assisters in our state, and are often lifted up as a model for other states. Benefit assisters not only help people apply for 3SquaresVT, but actually support our state agency by helping ensure applications are completed accurately, reducing administrative burden on the state, and supporting a low SNAP payment error rate.

They also play a critical role in supporting emergency response. We saw this with the unprecedented lapse in federal benefits in November 2025. We've also seen this during two summers of catastrophic flooding. 3SquaresVT participants were able to receive replacement benefits to compensate for food lost due to flood damage. In each of these dire emergency situations, benefit assisters played a truly critical role in helping people understand what was happening, what was available to them, and what they needed to do to get the food they needed. Investing in this existing network of benefit assisters at trusted organizations will only strengthen our state's emergency response.

Benefit assisters are responding now to many complex program changes and greater needs, including losses in federal funding for these operations. Investing in this existing network will have a multiplier effect by ensuring eligible people continue receiving 3SquaresVT, which means federal dollars continue flowing into our economy.

Food security is a policy choice, and 3SquaresVT is an essential part of the pathway to achieving food security for all in Vermont. There are policy choices before you that will go far in ensuring the best outcomes for all in this moment. My fellow partners will speak to additional complementary requests, but I will highlight two:

1. Please fully fund the administrative costs needed for state fiscal year 2027 to counter federal funding changes and keep 3SquaresVT available and accessible to people in Vermont
2. Please support the appropriation of \$4.95 million in FY2027 for Benefit Assistants for SNAP & Medicaid.