



Suzanne Routhier- Bloomfield, VT

Program Manager: Food Access Services

Northeast Kingdom Community Action (NEKCA)

Testimony: Senate Government Operations

Hello-- First, thank you so much for the opportunity to speak with you all today. It is an honor to represent my colleagues in our statewide efforts to support the most disadvantaged in our state.

Again, my name is Suzanne Routhier from Bloomfield, VT. I oversee the Food Access Programming at Northeast Kingdom Community Action. NEKCA is the local Community Action Agency in the NEK and serves the counties of Caledonia, Orleans and Essex. NEKCA provides services to low-income Vermonters in our area in the effort to lift families out of poverty.

I am here today speaking in support the request for \$5 million in base and one-time funding in the FY26 budget for the Vermont Foodbank to be prepared when disasters strike our neighbors in towns across Vermont, to purchase and distribute food, and support the network of community-based food shelves and meal sites. This programming request is critical for being prepared for the next natural disaster in our state.

While the past two years of flooding related disasters weigh heavily on our minds, natural disasters in Vermont are not new to our state. As trends continue, we must be better prepared statewide to respond to the emergent needs being seen within affected communities. As you are all aware, the July flooding of 2023 and 2024 drastically impacted our state and continues to have lasting effects.

In 2024, because of an emergency donation received from the Vermont Foodbank, NEKCA was able to provide over 500 services to community members affected by the floods. The

Vermont Foodbank provided emergency food provision boxes which were filled with essentials to get households through periods without the ability to store and cook meals. Additionally, the foodbank provided pallets of water to NEKCA, which allowed access for households who were disconnected from services, or on a boil notice, fresh, clean water. I cannot stress enough the importance of the aid this provided to our community members.

I also want to share with you the story of Bea. Bea is a 74-year-old lifelong Vermonter. She uses our St. Johnsbury food shelf regularly to stretch her 3Squares money. Unfortunately, Bea's home was hit by the flooding and for a time she had no water, no food, and no idea what was going to happen. As a result of the Vermont Foodbank's donation from their Responsive Readiness Program, Bea along with over 200 other households were supported with food and water allowing them to bridge the gap during the beginning stages of disaster relief. Bea continues to access our services, and still, each time, months later, she thanks us for the help we were able to give her during her time of need.

Sadly, Bea's story is not unique, many throughout our state struggle to gain access to food and clean water, especially during moments of disaster. Please, support the request for \$5 million in base and one-time funding in the FY26 budget for the Vermont Foodbank to be prepared when disasters strike our neighbors in towns across Vermont, to purchase and distribute food, and support the network of community-based food shelves and meal sites. Northeast Kingdom Community Action, a Vermont Foodbank partner, is in full support of the Foodbank's request.

I want to thank you for your time and consideration. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at [srouthier@nekavt.org](mailto:srouthier@nekavt.org).