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In Support of H.657—Correcting A Structural Weakness in Vermont’s Reach Up Program

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Hunger Free Vermont’s mission is to end the injustice of hunger for everyone, prioritizing those who are most affected by hunger in Vermont as we work toward creating permanent and systemic food security for all of us. Hunger is almost always the result of families having insufficient resources to meet all of their most basic needs—for housing, healthcare, utilities, transportation, and food—at the same time and consistently.

Hunger Free Vermont supports H.657, and specifically urges this Committee to reject the Department for Children and Families’ request to retain the asset limit in Reach Up.

In Vermont, families with young children, and in particular single parents raising children, are at high risk for experiencing hunger and food insecurity.¹ The lowest income families in this category are the families who are eligible for and served by Reach Up. This is why Hunger Free Vermont has consistently advocated for the State of Vermont to address weaknesses in the structure of Vermont’s Reach Up program that has led over time to Reach Up benefits no longer coming close to fulfilling the program’s purpose of ensuring families raising children in poverty at minimum receive an income that brings them up to the Federal Poverty Level. Indeed, Reach Up has received no cost of living adjustment

H.657 takes one critical step to correcting the structural failures of Vermont’s Reach Up Program by eliminating the asset limit. Eliminating the asset limit in the Reach Up program would make it easier for families raising children in poverty to save. Without the ability to save, it is extremely difficult to ever exit poverty. For example, asset limits in federal programs like TANF or SNAP make it impossible for a parent to save enough to purchase a used car to enable them to take a better paying job that is not on one of Vermont’s scarce bus lines, or to pay tuition for a certification program that would qualify them for a career path with higher salaries.

In addition, eligibility barriers like asset tests create burdensome and costly processes for the state agencies that must administer programs like Reach Up. According to research conducted by the national Center on Law and Social Policy, states that have eliminated the asset limit in their TANF programs have found that the administrative savings have significantly outweighed any increase in program cost due to the number of families eligible for benefits. The same study found that in the 9 states that have eliminated the asset limit in TANF, doing so did not significantly increase the caseload.²

Given that the income limits for Reach Up are very low, the application process is rigorous, and the stigma surrounding applying for poverty programs is high, it should be noted here that DCF’s assertion that eliminating the asset limit could significantly increase the Reach Up caseload as a result of seasonal workers becoming eligible for Reach Up (such as

¹ National Food Access and COVID Research Team, [August 2021 and January 2025 research briefs](#).

² Ashley Burnside and Jesse Fairbanks, [“Eliminating Asset Limits: Creating Savings for Families and State Governments”](#) (CLASP, 2023), pp. 5-6.

“teachers during summer months”) is absurd.³ Vermont already has eliminated the asset limit from 3SquaresVT (our state name for SNAP-the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program), which serves tens of thousands more households than Reach Up, with no dire consequences.

Hunger Free Vermont urges this Committee to pass H.657 as passed by the House, and thanks you for your consideration of the need to take this first critical step toward the many significant structural changes needed in Vermont’s Reach Up program so that it better serves children living in severe poverty in our state.

³ [DCF Omnibus Memo v.3](#), testimony submitted to the Senate Committee on Health and Welfare on 4-13-2026.