



# Written Testimony on S.42

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*Presented to*

Vermont Senate Committee on Health and Welfare

Winter 2025

Hayden Dublois, *Visiting Fellow*  
FGA Action

My name is Hayden Dublois, and I am a Visiting Fellow at FGA Action, a non-profit organization dedicated to advancing public policy solutions. I am also a former Vermonter who appreciates the opportunity to weigh in on this important policy discussion.

Thank you for allowing me to provide opportunity to submit testimony to your committee S.42, an act relating to implementing the Restaurant Meals program.

FGA Action opposes this bill for the following reasons.

S.42 would require the state's participation in the food stamp program's "Restaurant Meals Program." Currently, Vermont is one of the overwhelming majority of states with the longstanding rule of not allowing food stamp enrollees to use the cash loaded on their Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) cards at private restaurants.<sup>1</sup> This is for good reason: Limiting EBT cards to stores that sell groceries and asking food stamp enrollees to prepare most of their meals was **designed to encourage more affordable and nutritious choices by program enrollees.**

In the overwhelming minority of states that use the Restaurant Meals Program, it is typically fast food restaurants that contract with the state to permit EBT card spending—such as McDonald's, Burger King, Wendy's, KFC, etc.<sup>2</sup> This runs directly contrary to the food stamp program's original goal of putting a balanced, nutritious diet within reach of low-income families by supplementing their purchasing power at grocery stores. **With an adult obesity rate of 26.8 percent, the last thing Vermont needs is to make fast food and sugary drinks even more attractive than healthier and more affordable, home-cooked meals.**<sup>3</sup>

For these reasons, we ask that you oppose S.42.

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<sup>1</sup> Food and Nutrition Service, "Restaurant Meals Program," U.S. Department of Agriculture (2024), <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/retailer/restaurant-meals-program>.

<sup>2</sup> Nicole Spector, "11 Fast Food Restaurants That Accept EBT," AOL (2022), <https://www.aol.com/finance/11-fast-food-restaurants-accept-180046859.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Centers for Disease Control, "Adult Obesity Prevalence Maps," CDC (2023), <https://www.cdc.gov/obesity/data/prevalence-maps.html>.