

Thank you Chair Lyons and committee for your time today.

I'm Carrie Stahler, Sr. Manager of Government & Public Affairs at Vermont Foodbank. I'm here to ask you to support Vermont Foodbank and our network of community food shelves and meal sites by supporting \$1.25 million of our \$5 million total request for FY26.

The last time we met was on 3SquaresVT Awareness Day when you welcomed our neighbor Jerome into your committee to talk about his experience with food access. Today, I'm here to ask you for funding that would support people like Jerome, who relies on the food shelf at Capstone in Barre to meet his food needs every week.

Across the state, our 300 network and community partner organizations are providing grocery foods and prepared meals to neighbors like Jerome, who is an older adult living on a limited income and needs a balanced diet to meet his health needs as a person with several chronic medical conditions. These organizations serve a wide variety of neighbors who are not able to afford enough food for themselves and their families for a wide variety of reasons. Many provide fresh and shelf-stable foods. **Our request of \$1.25M will support the capacity of these organizations delivering critical basic needs-oriented food access services to your constituents across the state.**

These organizations have weathered many storms in the past 5 years. During the COVID-19 pandemic, when pandemic-era supports were in place, Vermont Foodbank and our network shifted to new types of food distribution and delivery. Then, as those supports ended, the Vermont Foodbank and these partners supported increasing numbers of neighbors accessing food. One partner, the Putney Food Shelf, recently shared that they have seen a "250% increase in the number of households they serve since 2020. Just since, 2022 the increase is 158%."

Those numbers are not unique to Putney, we are hearing that from partners in all corners of the state that they continue to see more of their neighbors visiting their food shelf or meal site more frequently needing more food. We need continued partnership from the State to continue to try to meet the food access needs of our neighbors from Bennington to Canaan, from Brattleboro to the Islands. The funding request before you is a one-time request, and our hope is that by helping to meet people's food needs and support our network's capacity, we and our partners can maximize philanthropic support, while, at the same time, supporting our neighbors resulting in individuals across the state needing food assistance less and less as more of the root causes of food insecurity are addressed by the policies being passed by this body.

This urgent need does not need to be business as usual, together we can give the state time to implement policy solutions that you are working on to help ensure Vermonters no longer experience this sustained high need for food support, but we need to work together now to help ensure that the urgent food needs of our neighbors are met.

Please support this critical work by including \$1.25 million in one-time funding through DCF. As you can see from the chart on your committee's page, this funding works together with \$1.75 million in base funding for Emergency preparedness and Responsive Readiness, and \$2 million in local food purchase and distribution to support Vermont Foodbank, our network partners, and the needs of neighbors in all 14 counties.

Thank you for your time and for your support of neighbors' needs across Vermont.