HUNGER FREE VERMONT

38 Eastwood Drive, Suite 100
South Burlington, VT 05403

P: (802) 865-0255
F: (802) 865-0266
HungerFreeVT.org

In Support of S.243–Multi-Language Videos Are an Essential Tool for Public Health, Public Safety, and Basic Needs Benefits Access in Vermont

Anore Horton, Executive Director, Hunger Free Vermont
ahorton@hungerfreevt.org / 802-231-1293

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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. We urge this committee to support the vital public health access service The Vermont Language Justice Project provides with the funding proposed in S.243, and to advance this critical bill.

Immigrants and refugees, and people living with disabilities, are some of the groups in Vermont who are most at risk of hunger. At the same time, language barriers make these groups challenging to reach with timely information about the many different food and nutrition programs that are available. Until we began partnering with The Vermont Language Justice Project, Hunger Free Vermont struggled to honor our mission to prioritize making our outreach and public information services accessible for the people who are most at risk of being affected by hunger. Especially since the COVID-19 pandemic, our old approach of providing translated handouts and flyers is no longer sufficient or effective–if it ever was.

The Vermont Language Justice Project (VLJP) provides two interrelated services that are both critical for communicating accurate, timely, and clear public health messages–including those relating to food access. VLJP produces short videos in many different languages using native speakers from Vermont communities. Of equal importance, VLJP also has cultivated a network of trusted community members and community partners to distribute these videos, so they actually reach the people who need to see and hear them.

The value of the critical public health emergency services VLJP provides has been proven during the pandemic, during the catastrophic flooding our state experienced in 2023 and 2024, and again just this past October when there was widespread fear and uncertainty regarding the fate of November 3SquaresVT benefits as a result of USDA's refusal to issue benefits during the federal government shutdown. Thankfully, Vermont's Joint Fiscal Committee recommended, and Vermont's Emergency Board approved, using State funds to provide 3SquaresVT replacement benefits. We at Hunger Free Vermont needed help getting the word out quickly to people statewide in their native languages (including English!)–and people who are hearing and/or visually impaired–around the state to let them know what to expect and to ease the huge pressure community food shelves were already experiencing. We could never have accomplished this critical service in such a compressed period of time without VLJP.

On October 30th 2025, Hunger Free Vermont asked the Vermont Language Justice Project to create a video explaining the details of the impending cuts to SNAP benefits–which we had only just learned would be carried out by DCF–that would occur two days later, on November 1st. Within 36 hours VLJP had produced 17 informational videos in 17 languages about the cuts to SNAP benefits and how the State of Vermont was going to provide the benefits for the first 15 days of November. The playlist was immediately put out on social media and within the day had received over 4,000 hits. The same day, Hunger Free Vermont was also able to distribute the videos directly to the hundreds of direct service

providers around the state that are members of our regional Food Security Networks. By the end of the weekend, the VLJP videos had been viewed over 5,000 times. The English language video received, I believe, the highest number of views, showing that the Vermont Language Justice Project truly meets a critical need for all Vermonters.

Hunger Free Vermont contracts directly with VLJP for their services, and will continue to do so. The examples I have shared here would not be funded through S.243. However, I hope these examples demonstrate the public health value of VLJP's services. While none of us can predict exactly what public health emergencies we may face in the near-term future, unfortunately I think that the past six years have proven that the likelihood that new public health emergencies are looming on the near horizon is very high. S.243 wisely puts a plan in place to ensure that every one of us in Vermont will have access to the critical and even life-saving information we need during times of emergency.

Thank you for the opportunity to share Hunger Free Vermont's experience with the Vermont Language Justice Project and to express our strong support of S.243.