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Thank you, Chair Lyons and members, for allowing us time in Senate Health and Welfare on this, the fourth annual 3SquaresVT Awareness Day, to acknowledge this essential program and to ask for your support on requests that together will ensure the best outcomes for people in Vermont–for our communities, our farmers, and our economy.

3SquaresVT is known nationally as SNAP–and in many households across Vermont, it is also known as a lifeline. By choosing the name, "3SquaresVT", Vermont made a commitment to the goal of people having 3 square meals every day. This federal nutrition program, operated on behalf of the federal government by state agencies, is the most effective and efficient federal nutrition program because it provides funds directly to people *every month* to buy groceries through traditional channels–at grocery stores, general stores, farmers markets, and farm stands.

3SquaresVT helps nearly 10% of our state buy groceries every month–about 61,000 people–the vast majority of whom are children, older adults, and people with disabilities. In order to get 3SquaresVT benefits each month, people have to complete a lengthy application, provide verification about their income, expenses, and other details, complete an interview, and be found eligible by the Department for Children and Families.

This program is meant to support grocery costs for low-income households, and people have to be below certain income limits based on how many people they live with and share food costs with. For example, a single mom with two kids would be a household of three, and need to earn less than about $4,100 a month to qualify. That would be about $49,000 a year in income.

A calculation looking at the difference between monthly income and expenses is what determines the benefit a household gets every month–expenses such as rent, mortgage, utilities, and childcare. The lower-income a household is, the higher their benefit amount will be. The average monthly benefit for all 39,000 Vermont households in September 2025 was $319, which is about $79 per week, though benefits are deposited in total on the first of every month.

For most households, benefits are issued on an EBT Card that looks and works just like a debit card and can be used at more than 600 retailers in Vermont, as well as 40 farmers markets, many farm stands, and CSAs. These benefits flow directly into our state economy when people buy groceries with 3SquaresVT. In any given month, 3SquaresVT keeps more than $12 million in our state economy. This makes 3SquaresVT not only our most effective food security program, but a truly essential economic stimulus program. In rural areas, that spending often determines whether a small business can keep its doors open or not.

For the over 61,000 Vermonters who rely on 3SquaresVT every month to buy groceries, and the 600+ retailers and farmers who depend on those funds to support their bottom lines, this program is essential. It is a dignified, private, and

incredibly efficient way to support hardworking Vermonters, older Vermonters, Veterans, children, people with disabilities, so that they can have the food they need.

While 3SquaresVT effectively reaches the most low-income folks in Vermont, we know that the program only reaches roughly 40% of potentially eligible Vermonters according to Census income data.[1] There are a number of reasons for this discrepancy, including additional eligibility requirements, and the burdensome application process. This is one of the many reasons why having trained and trusted benefits assistors at organizations across Vermont is so important.

Another recent example is when we saw the largest funding and eligibility changes to SNAP (at the federal level) in the history of the program, with the passage of H.R.1 in July 2025. There were three major changes to SNAP eligibility which have already impacted our communities in serious ways.

- Far fewer people who are immigrants can access SNAP, including refugees and people granted asylum. On October 1, 2025 change impacted more than 119 households, including more than 400 people, though 90 people regained eligibility in December when USDA corrected their initial ruling on this change.
- More people have to report information about their work or volunteer activity in order to keep benefits for more than 3 months in a 3 year period. Veterans, people experiencing homelessness, and people who have aged out of foster care, are no longer automatically exempt from this rule, and people with kids 14 and older are newly subject. This is a very confusing rule for households and many people who are otherwise eligible for 3SquaresVT may lose benefits because they don't know what or how to report information to the state.
- More people have to report information about whether they pay for heating or cooling, or risk losing a portion of monthly benefits. This is because monthly benefits are based on a calculation of monthly income and monthly expenses. 2,600 households saw a benefit decrease in October 2025 because they'd never had to report this information before.

These changes in effect make it more challenging for lower-income folks to tap into this important grocery support. Not only did our state agency have to work hard to understand and implement these changes, but service providers had to work quickly to communicate these changes to communities. And while we must keep 3SquaresVT available to the tens of thousands of Vermonters who tap into this program to afford groceries, we also must ensure that people who have lost eligibility or have never been eligible can tap into other resources, including the charitable food system.

In 2022–our most current state data–UVM researchers found that 2 in 5 people in Vermont were at risk of hunger over the past year. USDA research released December 2025 which looks at calendar year 2024 indicates that people across the U.S. are at risk of hunger at higher rates than the prior year, a trend that we have seen every year since 2021–which marked the end of pandemic-era government support.

Food security is a policy choice, and 3SquaresVT is an essential part of the pathway to supporting households while we work together to achieve food security for all in Vermont. The message we want to convey to you today is that together, we can work to ensure that everyone in Vermont, at all times, has the food they need to thrive. Legislators have a critical role to play in making policy decisions that ensure the best outcomes for Vermonters.

When the State of Vermont invests in meaningful support for food security, the positive impacts are felt across the entire state. There are policy choices in front of you this year that can support food security for all who live here. Most critically, we urge you to ensure that DCF has full and robust funding to administer 3SquaresVT, including to support the public outreach work required to make sure everyone who is eligible and needs this food security program can access it.

[1] Roughly 165,000 people in VT live at or below 185% FPL. Source: American Community Survey (2022), accessed January 7, 2025